ames Fenimore Cooper:
Well-Tempered Democrat
by
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Thesis

JAMES FENIMORE COOPER: WELL-TEMPERED DEMOCRAT

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I INTRODUCTION

1789 was a crucial year in American history. The new government, delayed by indifference and bad roads, had assembled in New York that spring. Washington's inauguration had been held on April 6th, nearly a month later than the appointed date. Slowly the administration picked its way towards a program of recovery from the financial ruin of the Confederation. In late September the "Bill of Rights" Amendments to the constitution were proposed, almost exactly two years after the Convention at Philadelphia had completed its work. Such was the state of the Union when James Cooper[1] was born in Burlington, New Jersey, 19 September 1789. When Cooper died sixty-two years later (14 September 1851), the nation had passed through two wars successfully, if not entirely creditably. She had grown tremendously, in size, in population, and in influence. Already divisive forces within had fearfully strained the bonds of union; an uneasy truce existed between North and South, a truce which was to postpone the holocaust for a decade. The first epoch in American history properly ends with the compromise of 1850 rather than with the outbreak of hostilities in 1861. Consequently Cooper's life span almost exactly parallels that of the old union.

1. Thomas R. Lounsbury, James Fenimore Cooper, (Boston, 1885), 3. In accordance with the wishes of his maternal grandmother, Cooper had his name changed by an act of the New York Legislature (1826) to Fenimore-Cooper. He dropped the hyphen however.

During these three score odd years great changes had been brought to bear on American life. From a weak confederation of thirteen tiny republics, the country had developed into a lusty and virile (if not mature) nation. It had overflowed the Appalachian mountain barrier into the west and Manifest Destiny had spread the flag over a large portion of the North American continent. Though the nation was still predominantly agricultural, increasing numbers of her citizens were entering commerce and manufacturing; Hamilton's program for fostering our "infant industries" was beginning to bear fruit. The old landed "aristocracy" was giving way (except in the slave-holding South) to the merchant, stock-jobber, and entrepreneur on the one hand and the land-hungry masses on the other. Politically the nation had become democratic to an extent undreamed of by Washington, Adams, and Jefferson.

Concurrently with the opening of the west and the beginnings of scientific and industrial progress, Europe had sent us Romanticism. Eighteenth century rationalist belief in order and perfectionism had fallen before the idea of Progress. In literature and the arts, Romanticism (and too frequently, sentimentalism) reigned supreme. Jane Austen had been succeeded by Walter Scott and he in turn by Dickens on the pinnacles of literary fame abroad; their names had echoed here as well. Greek and Roman revival architecture had given way to the Gothic. American painters were depicting the American scene romantically, in landscapes and genre sketches. In the

field of religion, the Calvinist Congregationalists had been split wide open by the Unitarian movement. The early nineteenth century was, then, a period of ferment, of social, political, intellectual and economic change. It would be impossible for a man, sensitive and intelligent, to live throughout this period without reflecting, in some measure at least, the tremendous changes occurring in American life.

Cooper's life and work represent a type case of eighteenth century reaction to the new mores of an expanding and acquisitive society. The course of his philosophy is a journey from the quiet confidence of Jefferson through Jacksonian optimism to a pessimism and despair nearly equal to that of Henry Adams. Throughout most of his life, the central core of Cooper's philosophy was a belief in the republican form of government based on democratic suffrage. Finally, however, he was to abandon most of his original principles but the task was a difficult one and the struggle long and painful.

Cooper's early works were romantic glorifications of the American scene. His heroes, Leatherstocking, Long Tom Coffin, and Harvey Birch, were idealizations of American types. Through these heroic figures, the novelist achieved an implicit statement of the benefits of democracy. Contact with Europe served to sharpen Cooper's belief in the democratic principle; consequently in his writing he became an open exponent of the American ideal. On his return to America, however, he discovered that democracy had its bad as well as its good

points. While clinging to the democratic core of his philosophy, he exercised the privilege of criticizing that which he felt was mean and ignoble in American life. Cooper's contact with Europe had sharpened his critical faculties at precisely the moment that American society was being uprooted by the Jacksonian revolution. Embittered by unjust criticisms and personal attacks, the novelist, in his later years, became more and more hostile in his attitude towards his native land and her pursuit of false gods. Finally, by the time of his death, he threw over his old Jeffersonian liberalism in favor of conservatism, pure and simple.

In his day Cooper was praised for his romantic tales, particularly the Leatherstocking series, and damned for his political writings, fiction and non-fiction. After his death, his political writings suffered a worse fate than being damned; they were generally ignored. Critical judgments were cast on them by men who had never bothered to read the works they were dimissing so lightly. The novels with a political overtone were reprinted in various editions of Cooper's works fairly regularly. The critical prose did not fare so well: The first reprinting of The American Democrat (1838) was in 1931; Sketches of Switzerland (1836) has never been reprinted; of the Gleanings in Europe series, France (1837) was reprinted in 1928, England (1837) was reprinted in 1930, and Italy (1838) has not as yet been reprinted. Publishing records, dull as most statistics, do throw considerable light on public

reception of Cooper's critical works.[1] The comparatively recent dates of republication for The American Democrat, France, and England indicate that Cooper has been reevaluated in the last few decades. Such is the fact. Perhaps the first real interpretive criticism of Cooper was that by Vernon Louis Parrington in his The Romantic Revolution in America (1927). More recent summaries are to be found in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Jackson (1946) and Van Wyck Brooks, The World of Washington Irving (1944). Monographic works include Robert E. Spiller, Fenimore Cooper: Critic of his Times (1931), Dorothy Waples, The Whig Myth of James Fenimore Cooper (1938) and Marcel Clavel, Fenimore Cooper and his Critics (1938).

The purpose of this thesis will be to attempt to trace the development of Cooper's thought, political, social, and economic, with special reference to the influence of democratic ideas on that thought. In this respect, some analysis of his place in American life and letters, as seen by contemporaries and later critics will be given though the burden of the proof will rest on his own writings rather than the opinions of others. An attempt will be made to link changes in his thought with the shifting American scene, to discover whether his reactions to the main currents in American life were positive or negative. Though the growth of thought is an organic, hence

1. Robert E. Spiller and Philip C. Blackburn, A Descriptive Bibliography of the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper, (New York, 1934), passim.

continuous, process, it will be found convenient to break the study into chronological periods, periods which produced marked shifts in the evolution of his ideas.

An attempt will be made to illustrate his ideas as they present themselves in his novels, critical prose, correspondence, and life. Contemporary reactions to his exposition of these ideas will be noted to fix more exactly his place in his own society while a critical interpretation of the whole will be essayed in an effort to evaluate his significance for the America of today.

II FORMATIVE INFLUENCES

The Heritage of the Past

Cooper's early years were spent on the New York frontier at Cooperstown. His father, Judge William Cooper, was a prominent land owner and Federalist politician in the Otsego region. The elder Cooper had been the chief land holder in that area and to him must go much of the credit for the settlement of Otsego County in New York. As a large property owner he tended toward conservatism in politics; in the political battles of the day he was a rough-and-tumble fighter for the Federalist cause. He was not above using his position as a judge and as landlord to influence the voters of the region.[1] The violence of his political activity was even expressed on a physical plane when occasion warranted; indeed, his death, in 1809, was the direct result of an assault by a political opponent.[2] When Judge Cooper removed to Otsego to take possession of his holdings (1787), he had procured 29,350 acres of land at a cost of approximately fifty cents an acre. Joining the landlord aristocracy was not a difficult or expensive

1. Dixon Ryan Fox, The Decline of Aristocracy in the Politics of New York, (New York, 1919), 140-142

2. Robert E. Spiller, Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times, (New York, 1931), 12-25. Prof. Spiller gives a lively account of Judge Cooper.

II. ROTTEN BOROUGHS

The Heritage of the Past

Dorsetshire early years saw a court on the New York legislature to be created. Hitherto, Duke William Hoonah, was a powerful and conservative political multitude in the Hungo nation. The elder Hoonah had been the chief land holder in which estates, in his opinion, to add or take away the territories of Hoonah County in New York. As a large property owner he looked toward conservatism in politics; in the political theories of Jefferson he was a round-and-trouble fighter for the Federalist cause. He was not active during his position as a judge and as Jefferson in Jefferson the governor of the region. The violence of his political activity was even accompanied in a mystical of no mean consequence whatever; indeed, his death, in 1808, was the direct result of an assault by a political opponent.[2] Upon his a lower recovery to Dorset towards possession of his relations (1807), he had procured 50,000 acres of land at a cost of [illegible] dollars cents an acre. Johnson the landed aristocracy was not a difficult or expensive

1. Dixon Ryan Fox, The Decline of Aristocracy in the Politics of New York, (New York, 1919), 110-112.

2. Robert [illegible] Pridgen, Dorset County, Birth of the Empire, (New York, 1911), 12-20. Prof. Robert Pridgen's lives of the ancestors of Duke Hoonah.

process in those days.[1]

The Otsego that Cooper knew as a boy was not a true Wilderness region. The landlords, particularly his father, had encouraged a rapid settlement of the district. Judge Cooper could claim that forty thousand souls held land "directly or indirectly under me."[2] The Indian and the trapper had already migrated westward; still, there were traces of frontier left in the village and surrounding farms. Cooper draws on his boyhood impressions of Cooperstown frequently in his later novels---chiefly in the Templeton of The Pioneers. Life was simple but not mean at the seat of such an estate as that of William Cooper. The landlord was a gentleman of attainments who expected to serve the public, to make his talents useful to the nation which created his wealth.[3] This tradition of an aristocracy based on land was to have a profound influence on Cooper's thought, especially in the later phases. For most of his life, Cooper was to hold to the Jeffersonian dictum---

1. James Fenimore Cooper, Chronicles of Cooperstown, in Rev. S. T. Livermore, A Condensed History of Cooperstown, (Albany, 1862), 21-22. These holdings were increased steadily and his great-grandson tells us that his total land holdings aggregated over three quarters of a million acres. "When he died in 1809 he was supposed to be worth about seven hundred thousand dollars." James Fenimore Cooper, Legends of a Northern Country, (New York, 1920), 254.

2. F. W. Halsey, The Old New York Frontier, (New York, 1901), 360.

3. William Cooper was a judge and served two terms in Congress as well. He worked diligently for the advancement of Otsego County as a patron of the arts and sciences. Cf. Livermore, op. cit., 39, 42, 59.

"Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God."[1] But the Jeffersonian doctrine was modified to include a place for the gentleman landlord as well as the simple tiller of the soil. His early associations were tied up with an expanding democratic community directed by an aristocratic man of property. Cooper's background led him to believe that class delineation was possible and desireable in a democracy as long as the upper classes held no political power as a right.

The Early Years

Cooper's schooling was brief. In 1800 he was sent to Albany to study under the direction of an Anglican minister, the Rev. Thomas Ellison. Much of the novelist's later character seems to have resulted as a reaction to this man's influence. In a letter to a friend and schoolmate, William Jay, Cooper reminisced concerning their clerical pedagogue.[2]

> Thirty-six years ago, you and I were school-fellows and class-mates in the house of a clergyman of the true English school. This man was an epitome of the national prejudices, and in some respects of the national character. He was the son of a beneficed clergyman in England; had been regularly graduated at Oxford and admitted to orders; entertained a most profound reverence for the king and the nobility; was not backward in expressing his contempt for all classes of dissenters and all ungentlemanly sects; was particularly severe on all immoralities of the French Revolution, and, though eating our bread was not especially lenient to our own;. . . spent his money freely, and sometimes that of other people; was particularly tenacious of the ritual and of all the decencies of the Church; detested a democrat as he did the devil; cracked his jokes daily about Mr. Jefferson

1. Thomas Jefferson, Notes on Virginia in The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, (Federal edition), ed. by Paul Leicester Ford, (New York, 1904), 85.

2. James Fenimore Cooper, England, (London, 1837), II, 106-108.

> and Black Sal, never failing to place his libertinism in strong relief against the approved morals of George III, of several passages in whose history it is charity to suppose he was ignorant; decried all morals, institutions, churches, manners, and laws but those of England, Mondays and Saturdays; and as it subsequently became known, was living every day in the week, in vinculo matrimonii, with another man's wife.

When this gentleman died (1803), Cooper, age thirteen, entered Yale. Apparently Rev. Mr. Ellison had taught his classics well, whatever his prejudices. The young scholar did not apply himself seriously to his studies, however. After a series of escapades he was expelled in his junior year, reputedly for attempting to blow up a fellow student's room.[1]

His father's attempt at giving the lad a formal education having proved a failure, Cooper was sent to a more practical school. He was bound to the master of the sloop, Sterling, as an apprentice seaman, sailing from New York in the fall of 1806. The story of that trip to England and the Mediterranean is related in Ned Myers. His experiences on deep water gave him a love of the sea which was to last for the rest of his life. The impressions he received colored many of his later works; indeed, much of his antipathy towards England may emenate from the several cases of impressment that occurred during this voyage. Shortly after his return he received an appointment as a midshipman in the United States Navy, his warrant, signed by Jefferson, being dated 1 January 1808. However, a naval career did not seem too promising, either.

1. Spiller, op. cit., 44.

He was stationed on the Great Lakes for a year, then on the sloop, Wasp; by May, 1810, he had decided to resign. This decision may be partly attributed to "the blasted prospects of the service." A more telling reason, perhaps, is disclosed in a letter to his brother, 18 May 1810.[1]

> Like all the rest of the sons of Adam, I have bowed to the influence of the charms of a fair damsel of eighteen. I loved her like a man and told her of it like a sailor. . . .Susan De Lancey is the daughter of a man of very respectable connections and a handsome fortune--amicable, sweet tempered and happy in her disposition. She has been educated in the country, occasionally trying the temperature of the city to rub off the rust--but hold a moment; it is enough that she pleases me in the qualities of her person and mind. Like a true Quixotic lover, I made proposals to her father. . . .He also informs me that his daughter has an estate in the county of Westchester in reversion, secured to her by a deed in trust to him, and depending on the life of an aunt, AEtat 70--so you see Squire, the old woman can't weather it long. I write all this for you---you know I am indifferent to anything of this nature. . . .Then take your pen and write to Mr. De Lancey stating the happiness and pleasure it will give all the family to have this connection completed. All this I wish you to do immediately, as I am deprived of the pleasure of visiting my flame, until this be done, by that confounded bore, delicacy.---Be so good as to enclose the letter in one to me; at the same time don't forget to enclose a handsome sum to square the yards here and bring me up to Cooperstown.

The marriage was celebrated on the first day of 1811 in the De Lancey family home, Heathcote Hill, at Mamaroneck, N. Y.

The De Lanceys were allied to the old New York aristocracy, semi-feudal in character, which had been established by the Dutch and continued by the English. Like William Cooper, they

1. James Fenimore Cooper, ed., The Correspondence of James Fenimore Cooper, (New Haven, 1922), I, 81-83

amassed large holdings of land, but their small lots were rented where his were sold.[1] Living close to the town of New York but maintaining country residences, they were more a part of ordered "society." William Cooper had made his fortune in the wilderness; there he was society. The De Lanceys' lands and wealth were inherited; they were members of society in Westchester. Though Cooper, a product of the frontier, did not agree with the family's Tory philosophy, he may very well, as Professor Spiller suggests, have been influenced in his social thinking by his new associations.[2] A good part of his early married life was spent on the De Lancey family estates in Westchester, the easy, cultured life of a country gentleman appealing to him strongly. It was the type of existence held up as ideal in the later "anti-rent" novels, Satanstoe, The Chainbearer, and The Redskins. The theme of The American Democrat is the place of the "gentleman" in a democratic society. At the time of the above letter, he had the seaman's disdain for conventional rules of society, though he was willing to abide by them. After sixteen years of marriage to "amiable, sweet tempered" Susan, he found these rules most important. Large sections of Homeward Bound and Home as Found are devoted to condemnations of the provincial rudeness found in American society.

1. Spiller, op. cit., 61.
2. Ibid., 62.

Perhaps this influence is most strong in his first novel, Precaution, published in 1820. The story goes that Cooper threw down an English novel in disgust, saying, "I could write you a better book than that myself."[1] What the novel was that Cooper threw down has long been a matter of conjecture among scholars.[2] For our purposes, the question is somewhat academic, the importance of Precaution being that it is a picture of "society" in England. Of it Cooper said himself in 1842.[3]

> Between the ages of twenty and thirty, I read few novels, and cared very little about them. At length, a pure accident induced me to commence Precaution. . . .I printed Precaution at my own risk. It was reprinted by Colburn, and had a certain degree of success in both countries. The book was purely English in plot and design. Many of the critical sages of this country fancied they saw the evidence it was written in England and set up here as a mystification! The knowledge it betrayed of English society was of the most worthless and superficial kind, and yet I think it gained me more reputation in that way, than my own subsequent work on England -- a book written after six visits to the country, and under circumstances singularly favorable to observation!

Cooper stresses that the picture he presented was not a true picture of English society. He had not seen that society nor had he read many novels relating to that society, his daughter

1. Susan Fenimore Cooper, "Small Family Memories," The Correspondence of James Fenimore Cooper, I, 38.

2. Cf. George E. Hastings, "How Cooper Became a Novelist," American Literature, XII (March, 1940), 21-52

3. Quoted in Marcel Clavel, Fenimore Cooper and His Critics, (Aix-en-Provence, 1938), 395.

Susan to the contrary notwithstanding.[1] This portrayal must then have been influenced by the society he did know. Nothing in his Cooperstown existence would have supplied this sort of information. On the other hand, the De Lanceys moved in the best of New York's social circles. That this society is reproduced to some extent, perhaps unconsciously, in Precaution seems probable. Precaution, admittedly not a first class production but enjoying some popularity, stimulated Cooper to further activity. He tells us that "having accidentally produced an English book, I determined to write one wholly American by way of atonement."[2] From this time forth his concern was to be generally with American scenes and always with American themes.

1. Susan Fenimore Cooper, loc. cit.

2. Clavel, op. cit., 395.

III THE ROMANTIC DEMOCRAT

After Precaution

Cooper's first effort had been a failure, even in his own estimation; it had been disappointing financially and literarily. However, Colburn had thought enough of it to pirate an English edition; that at least was encouraging. But it was time now to treat of more important things than English high society. Thirteen years later he was to say in A letter to his Countrymen.[1]

> Ashamed to have fallen into the track of imitation, I endeavoured to repair the wrong done to my own views, by producing a work that should be purely American, and of which love of country should be the theme.

The Spy (1821) was a great success and the necessary stimulus for further production. After its publication, Cooper wrote eight more romantic tales of American scenes in quick succession, dealing with the Revolution, the frontier, the sea and the wilderness or combinations of these themes. This activity was continued even after his arrival in Europe in 1826 though his interests were then beginning to shift to a more positive statement of American principles. This aim was really implicit in all of the novels before its direct statement in The Bravo, with the exception of Precaution. As a keen observer noted in 1859:[2]

1. England, III (London, 1837), 305. (The Letter is reprinted as an Appendix.)

2. "James Fenimore Cooper," North American Review, LXXXIX (October, 1859), 297.

> In those early scenes of border life and maritime adventure, which he has depicted with such authenticity and vividness, the philosophic reader will discern the wholesome self-discipline, the inevitable self-dependence, the absolute freedom, the simple manners, the integrity, and the courage which constituted the original basis of American character.

The Spy was one of the most successful of all of Cooper's novels. Within ten years there had been six American, three English, four French (one in English), nine German (two in English), and one each Swedish, Italian, and Spanish editions.[1] In 1831 he brought out a thoroughly revised text, which is the basis for the novel as it appears in his collected works.[2] Even without this revision, the work was well received. The North American, after conceding he was not the equal of Scott and criticizing his pictures of high life, waxed rhapsodic.[3]

> He has the high praise, and will have, we may add, the future glory, of having struck a new path, of having opened a mine of exhaustless wealth - in a word, he has laid the foundations of American romance, and is really the first who has deserved the appellation of a distinguished American novel writer.

The North American had stated that Cooper was best in descriptions of low life and of action.[4] For an American book this

1. Robert E. Spiller and Philip C. Blackburn, A Descriptive Bibliography of the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper (New York, 1934), 21-26.

2. Tremaine McDowell, "James Fenimore Cooper as Self-Critic," Studies in Philology, XXVII (July, 1930), 508-516.

3. W. H. Gardiner, "The Spy", North American Review, XV (July, 1822), 281.

4. W. H. Gardiner, loc. cit., 276.

should have been sufficient. Did not the vital elements in American society spring from low life? This was a frontier land, an expanding society, where the emphasis was on action not words and it was the lower classes of society that provided the action. The hero of the novel, Harvey Birch, is not a copy of any actual individual; rather he is an idealization of the American character.[1] Birch is an humble citizen, somewhat mean in background, deportment and manner, but he has sufficient patriotism and strength of character to be willing to undergo imputations as to his loyalty as well as to brave personal danger. To be an outcast from the community while serving that community in a most vital capacity requires moral fortitude of a high degree.

Harvey Birch's occupation is the somewhat ignominious one of spy. He seems to be little beyond a grubbing peddler when we first see him engaged in selling lace and calico and haggling over prices at that. We are not sure just where his allegience lies; he seems to be able to deal with both the British and the continental troops as a purveyor of information and trinkets.[2] From Captain Lawton's anxiety to capture him and the treatment the Skinners give him it seems apparent that

1. Cf. Tremaine McDowell, "The Identity of Harvey Birch," American Literature, II (May, 1930), 111-120.

2. The Spy, The Works of J. Fenimore Cooper, ten volumes (New York, 1893), I, 470-471.

he is a loyalist; at least such is his reputation in the country side.[1]

When captured by Lawton and his party, Birch fights against the temptation to reveal his connection with Washington. His decision to swallow his pass, apparently sealing his own doom, for the sake of security, requires moral stature of the highest degree.[2] After his escape Harvey continues to give warnings of danger to his implacable enemy, Lawton, much to the mystification of the latter.[3] Birch labors mightily to protect the American forces and the Wharton family at The Locusts but when Lawton sees him again he still refuses to reveal his true identity:[4]

> "Hold!" said Lawton; "But a word - are you what you seem? - can you - are you - "
> "A royal spy," interrupted Birch, averting his face, and endeavoring to release his hand.

Such are the tribulations of a spy, to be held in distrust and contempt by his own countrymen.

But did Birch receive no compensation for his services? He received the praise of George Washington and no more.[5]

> "I believe you are one of the very few that I have employed who have acted faithfully to our cause; and while you have passed as a spy of the enemy, have

1. The Spy, passim.
2. Ibid., 546.
3. Ibid., 563,567.
4. Ibid., 503.
5. Ibid., 651.

> never given intelligence that you were not permitted to divulge. To me, and to me only of all the world, you seem to have acted with a strong attachment to the liberties of America."

The General offers him payment for his services but the peddler refuses to accept the proffered gold.[1]

> "Does your excellency think that I have exposed my life and blasted my character for money?"
> "If not for money, what then?"
> "What has brought your excellency into the field? For what do you daily and hourly expose your precious life to battle and the halter? What is there about me to mourn, when such men as you risk their all for our Country? No - no - no - not a dollar of your gold will I touch; poor America has need of it all!"
> . . . . . .
> "That Providence destines this country to some great and glorious fate I must believe, while I witness the patriotism that pervades the bosoms of her lowest citizens." . . . "It must be dreadful to a mind like yours to descend into the grave branded as a foe to liberty; but you already know the lives that would be sacrificed should your real character be revealed. It is impossible to do you justice now. . ."

In general appearance, Harvey Birch may seem mean but there is nothing mean in his service to his country. Even the lowest classes of a free country are capable of the highest acts of self-abnegation in the interests of patriotism, Cooper shows us. The Spy is a glorification of patriotism as a moral force but it goes beyond that to become an idealization of the effect of a free political climate on the citizen. Cooper had found his field indeed: the portrayal of the development of American freedom.

1. The Spy, 651-652

The Romance of America

Cooper next turned to the frontier life of Otsego as a source. The Pioneers (1822) is derived from his own experience. Judge Temple, his "castle", and the village of Templeton are based directly on Judge William Cooper, Otsego Hall and Cooperstown. The portrait of the great pioneer is not wholly favorable, however. Marmaduke Temple served in a civil capacity during the revolution with dignity and usefulness without neglicting his personal fortunes:[1]

> While, however, he discharged his functions with credit and fidelity, Marmaduke never seemed to lose sight of his own interests; for, when the estates of the adherents of the crown fell under the hammer, by the acts of confiscation, he appeared in New York, and became the purchaser of extensive possessions at comparatively low prices.

By this sort of practice Judge Temple soon made himself rich enough to be almost above criticism in the region. The Pioneers was not to be noted so much for its portrayal of life in the settlements, however, as for its introduction of Natty Bumppo, The Leatherstocking, Cooper's most famous character.

In Natty Bumppo, Cooper crystallized the man of the American wilderness. He is, like Jim Bridger, Kit Carson, Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett, the forerunner of civilization. In youth as a hunter and warrior and in old age as a trapper he has lived his life outside the pale of the settlement. In The Pioneers, he is an aged man who views with dismay the villages

1. The Pioneers, The Works of J. Fenimore Cooper, ten volumes (New York, 1893), I, 560.

The Sommers of America

Conger does succeed in the Thoreau's life of Gideon in a manner. The Sommers (1920) is derived from his own experience. Judge Sommers, his father, and the village of Sommerton are based directly on Wyoming (Illinois) Seminary, Gideon's alma mater, Cooperstown. The portrait of the young Gideon is as lovable, favorable, however. Thus, Judge Tempel's summer is a vital capacity during the novel's action with liberty and independence and without sacrificing his personal integrity:

> While, however, he liked to see a Democrat lightly overall and flabby, he never seemed to lose sight of his own integrity. Even when the sentiments of the Democrats in the groups of his hearers were in keeping, by the lack of conformation, the Republican Judge Tempel, not because of the Democrats' problems, or strength, but because of their weakness, low minds.

By this, one of novelist Judge Tempel gives a little insight into the Democrat's problems in the nation. The Sommers was not to be dazed by the commercial at time in the southern state. However, as for his integrity of liberty Phenomena, The Underwater Country, Conger's last novel, shows that he is an open-minded man.

In a story, Conger, Conger's novel illustrated the, as a Democrat American wilderness. In it, Tree the Judge, if Dennis Doone and Mary Grandson, (Relationship of a young Indian to youth) a Sharon, and Wanderer, in the old age as a farmer, has lived his life guiding the path of the settlement. In The Sommers, he is an open man who views the Mary the village

1. The Sommers. The Works of G. Tempel Conger, one volume (New York, 1920), 1, 50.

rising around him. After the free and easy way of the wilderness, the complicated laws of civilization are too much for him. He and his Indian friends had once been lords of the whole of upper New York; now they were gone and he was forbidden by law to hunt as he pleased. These rules irked him especially since he had killed for use only; long acquaintanceship with Nature's bounty had not made him wasteful. When the men of the settlements destroy pigeons by the thousands from a migrating flock he complains bitterly. When the villagers take four times the number of fish they need he remonstrates again. He shoots his single pigeon and spears the fish he requires. Indeed he refuses an offer from Judge Temple to take his pick of the produce of the net.[1]

> "I eat of no man's wasty ways. I strike my spear into the eels or the trout, when I crave the creaters; but I wouldn't be helping to such a sinful kind of fishing for the best rifle that was ever brought out from the old countries. If they had fur, like the beaver, or you could tan their hides, like a buck, something might be said in favor of taking them by the thousand with your nets; but as God made them for man's food; and for no other disarnable reason, I call it sinful and wasty to catch more than can be eat."

Natty has always depended on his own quick eye and steady hand to procure food. Of all his accomplishments, he is most proud of his prowess with a rifle. He shoots a single pigeon on the wing nonchalantly. When the Judge's daughter is menaced by a female panther, enraged at the death of its young, she is startled to hear a voice from behind her say: "Hist! hist!"

1. <u>The Pioneers</u>, 683.

. . . "stoop lower , gal; your bonnet hides the creature's head." A shot follows and the wildcat rolls in the dust.[1] At the turkey shoot he succeeds where other's have failed, while his opponent quits the game in disgust:[2]

> "Where is the man that can hit a turkey's head at a hundred yards? I was a fool for trying. . . . Show me the man who can do it."
>
> "Look this-a-way, Billy Kirby" said Leatherstocking, "and let them clear the mark and I'll show you a man who's made better shots afore now, and that when he's been hard pressed by the savages and wild beasts."

Needless to say the shot is successful.

Many years later Mark Twain scoffed at such exhibitions.[3] He should have known better for Cooper was trying to do in his own way just what Twain himself had done so well, capture the extravagant spirit of the frontier. Granting the impossibility or, at least, the improbability of many of Leatherstocking's exploits, he still has a validity greater than Twain gave him credit for. Cooper was building up a legendary western type fit to associate with Paul Bunyan, Mike Fink and John Henry. Where their exploits frankly rest on supernatural powers, his are presented as the results of ability, training, soundness of body, and clarity of mind. As a recent critic suggests, he

1. The Pioneers, 707

2. Ibid., 647.

3. Cf. Samuel L. Clemens, "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offences", North American Review, CLXI (July, 1895), 1-12 and Bernard De Voto (ed.), Mark Twain, "Fenimore Cooper's Further Literary Offences," New England Quarterly, XIX (Sept, 1946) 291-301.

combines all the good features of the western scouts, hunters, and trappers with none of their bad.[1]

In time Natty runs foul of the law for killing a deer out of season and is sentenced to the stocks and a month's imprisonment. This is too much for the old hunter. Eventually he is pardoned but, once some personal business is tended to, he feels the need to strike out for newer lands even though it means leaving the scenes of his youth and manhood. He says simply:[2]

> "Why, lad, they tell me that on the big lakes there's the best of hunting and a great range, without a white man on it, unless it may be one like myself. I'm weary of living in clearings, and where the hammer is sounding in my ears from sunrise to sundown. . . ."
> . . . . . .
> "I have took but little comfort sin' your father [Judge Temple] come on with his settlers. . . . And now, I thought, was the time to get a little comfort in the close of my days. . . ."

And so Natty was forced out to the prairies of the Great Plains, leaving his beloved forest behind him in his flight from the settlements.

In The Prairie, Natty is considerably older than he was in The Pioneers, nearly a decade having elapsed. He is now a trapper, age having made him too infirm to continue his old occupation as a hunter. Yet he is still wise in the ways of

1. Lucy Lockwood Hazard, The Frontier in American Literature, (New York, 1927), 108-112

2. The Pioneers, 783

Nature and the Indian (and the white man as well). A lifetime of activity in the open has made him keen in mind even though his eye may have dimmed slightly and his hand may have lost its old steadiness. When his little party is threatened by a herd of stampeding buffalo, it is aged Natty who has the presence of mind to kill the leader, thus breaking the onrushing herd into two streams on either side.[1] Later the same group is caught in a prairie fire set by a band of marauding Indians. His younger companions wish to rush through the flames, into the arms of the Sioux, but Natty calmly saves the situation by starting a back fire.[2] He may be aged and infirm but he is still a better man than any white youth raised in the settlements or even in the frontier clearings. Truly, he is representative of the best of those hardy souls who cleared the way for future settlers: "Leatherstocking is the happy product of the romantic movement in literature and the Westward movement in history."[3] The series of tales that bear his name are a tribute to those intrepid citizens who turned their eyes westward. Others of his countrymen, however, turned eastward to the sea to perform just as glorious deeds.

1. The Prairie, 330 volume II of The Works of J. Fenimore Cooper, (New York, 1893), 213-442.

2. Ibid., 358-359

3. Lucy Lockwood Hazard, op. cit., 112.

Cooper's fourth novel, The Pilot, combined a story of the sea and the revolution. On the one level, officers such as Griffith, Barnstable and the Pilot utter patriotic sentiments concerning liberty and the necessity of revolution to maintain freedom. On the other, Long Tom Coffin shows the mettle of the common citizen in America as a seaman. The mysterious pilot, really John Paul Jones, tells young Griffith why he has chosen to incur the risks of joining the American "rebels".[1]

> "There is a glory in it, young man; if it be purchased with danger, it shall be rewarded with fame! It is true, I wear your republican livery, and call the Americans my brothers; but it is because you combat in behalf of human nature. Were your cause less holy, I would not shed the meanest drop that flows in English veins to serve it; but now, it hallows every exploit that is undertaken in its favor, and the names of all who contend for it shall belong to posterity. Is there no merit in teaching these proud islanders that the arm of liberty can pluck them from the very empire of their corruption and oppression?"

There are similar effusions made by other characters in the novel, for which the author was severely taken to task by a contemporary critic writing in the North American:[2]

> We have a common place, hackneyed sort of enthusiasm, on the subject of liberty, republican principles, &c.; but this is so common a theme of declamation in all assemblies, from Congress to the barroom, that it is ordinary and tame. . . .

However, the critic goes on to say:

1. James Fenimore Cooper, The Pilot, Illustrated Cabinet Edition, (Boston, n.d.), 236.

2. W. Phillips, "The Pilot", North American Review, XVIII (April, 1824), 329.

> . . . on the subject of our naval skill and prowess, although we are not willing to confess it, we are, yet, real enthusiasts. This is a string to which the national mind vibrates certainly and deeply -, . . .

All of the American seamen depicted are experts at their craft but the peer is the rugged old "cockswain" Long Tom Coffin. This hardy seaman is a product of which Nantucket may well be proud. His chief love is the sea:[1]

> "Give me plenty of sea-room, and good canvas, . . . I was born on board of a chebacco-man, and never could see the use of more land than now and then a small island to raise a few vegetables and to dry your fish - I'm sure the sight of it always makes me uncomfortable, unless we have the wind dead off shore.

Where Natty Bumppo boasts of his rifle and the deer he has brought down, Tom glories in his harpoon and the whale hunt. Of great courage as well as ability, Tom is a handy man in a battle; it is he who mans the long range gun on the Ariel. And it is he who sways the tide of battle when the boarding parties from the grappled Ariel and Alacrity struggle for a decision.[2] He is willing to undertake an expedition on land as well to follow up the victory but his captain rules against the dangerous attempt:[3]

> "Fool! do you think a boat's crew could contend with fifty armed soldiers?"
> "Soldiers!" echoed Tom. . . "that for all the soldiers that were ever rigged: one whale could kill

1. The Pilot, 24.
2. Ibid., 218-224.
3. Ibid., 226-227.

> a thousand of them! and here stands the man that has killed his round hundred of whales!"
>
> "Pshaw, you grumpus, do you turn braggart in your old age?"
>
> "It's no bragging, sir, to speak a log-book truth! but if Captain Barnstable thinks that old Tom Coffin carries a speaking trumpet for a figure head, let him pass the word forrard to man the boats."

Tom serves faithfully until the Ariel runs aground. Then he throws his protesting captain into the loaded launch and waits to go down with the ship. As Barnstable says, "He has only quitted me to die, where I should have died - as if he felt the disgrace of abandoning the poor Ariel to her fate, by herself."[1] When Tom Coffin dies the chief interest of The Pilot dies with him.

These early novels show Cooper's strong faith in America and her people. To point up the moral he takes for his heroes simple men of the people. Harvey Birch demonstrates that even a miserly peddler can put love of country above gain, life or honor. The Leatherstocking is a folk-type of American hero, her great frontiersmen idealized and simplified. Long Tom Coffin is to the sea what Natty Bumppo is to the wilderness. Both common men, they stand head and shoulder above their associates in strength, ability, and common sense. The novels not discussed here deal with similar themes. Of Cooper's work at this time a contemporary French critic

1. The Pilot, 323.

said.[1]

> The author is constantly citizen and philosopher. Throughout one finds. . . a profound faith in liberty, in equality, in religious ideas, in patriotism, in the dignity of human nature. . . finally one finds throughout the noble type of an American republican.

After The Pilot came Lionel Lincoln (1825), a story of Boston during the revolution of which Cooper said, "This book failed and perhaps justly. It was strictly an American Historical Novel, a class of which none has ever succeeded."[2] Next came another of the Leatherstocking series, The Last of the Mohicans (1826), which dealt with Natty Bumppo in his prime as a warrior and wilderness scout in the wars against the French and their Indian allies. Here Natty was much more idealized than he had been in the earlier Pioneers and The Prairie which followed in 1827. The latter novel was published in Europe, Cooper and his family having sailed from New York in the early summer of 1826. Here he was to meet with new ideas as well as to see the iniquities of aristocracy at close hand. European institutions soon sharpened his republicanism and his faith in the mass of men, bred under free American institutions.

1. F. A. S. in Le Globe, Paris, (19 June 1827) 175, quoted in Clavel, op. cit., 46. The text is as follows: "L'auteur y est constamment citoyen et philosophe. Partout on retrouve. . . une foi profonde à la liberté, à l'égalité, aux idees réligieuses, à la patrie, à la dignite de la nature humaine, . . . ou reconnaît enfin partout le noble type du republicain americain."

2. Quoted in Clavel, op. cit., 393.

IV THE DEMOCRAT ABROAD

Affirmation of Democracy

Cooper had arrived in Paris in June 1826 and remained there with his family until 1828. The best society in Paris was open to the author of The Spy. He visited Lafayette at La Grange; Jean Pierre David D'Angers did a bust of him. These events were duly recorded in letters to American friends. The latter evidently felt that their hero was in danger of being spoiled by this social gayety. His publishers wrote ". . . You will find New York and Philadelphia very dull when you return. . . .You had better come home at once and depend upon educating your children here."[1] But Cooper was enjoying himself too much to set sail for America. Instead the family went on a long tour, first to England, where they remained for the spring of 1828. That summer they traveled through Holland, Belgium, France, and Switzerland. Leaving Switzerland in October, the party journeyed through the Alps to Florence to establish themselves for the winter. The summer of 1829 was spent at Naples and Sorrento; winter at Rome. Spring of 1830 found them at Venice. From here the family moved on to Munich and Dresden; news of the July Revolution sped them back to Paris. In the summer of 1832 there was one last excursion up the Rhine to Switzerland. Outside of this, however, Paris was to be their home for the remainder of their time in Europe.

1. Correspondence of James Fenimore Cooper, I, (New Haven, 1922), 130, letter from Carey, Lea & Carey, 23 April 1827.

During this period Cooper was writing steadily. He found European ideas about America outlandish. Besides the misconceptions naturally due to the great distance between the two continents, there were those resulting from the malicious works of European travellers in America. In hopes of correcting these impressions he planned a short work on his beloved native democracy.[1] This work was Notions of the Americans: Picked Up By a Travelling Bachelor (1828), published simultaneously in Philadelphia, London, Paris, and Stuttgart.[2] It marks a definite turning point in Cooper's literary career. Hitherto, he had been content with romantic glorifications of the American scene; now he was to take up his cudgels in a full-fledged offensive on the opponents of American democracy.[3]

The Notions purports to be a series of letters from an European travelling in America to fellow members of a club. He is guided in his tour of the strange new country by an American friend, Cadwallader, whom he had met in Europe. His letters are frequently interspersed with extensive quotations from the

1. Karl J. Arndt, "The Cooper-Sealsfield Exchange of Correspondence," American Literature, XV, (March, 1943), 16-24.

2. Robert E. Spiller and Philip C. Blackburn, A Descriptive Bibliography of the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper, (New York, 1934), 56-57.

3. Cf. Fred L. Pattee, "Cooper The Critic" Saturday Review of Literature, V, (June 15, 1929), 1107-1108. Compare this with his earlier "James Fenimore Cooper", American Mercury, IV, (March, 1925), 289-297, in which he states categorically that Cooper was an aristocrat and not a democrat.

latter, presenting the American point of view as a foil to the traveller's opinions, supposed to be more impartial. The work is loaded with statistics which do not add to the pleasure of the reader, while the epistolary form is unfortunate in that it breaks up the continuity of the work. The artifice concerning the authorship could have deceived no one for the work in spots fairly reeks of chauvinism. The Notions is, above all, the record of an American who is proud of his country and of her democratic tradition. He goes to extremes to defend that country and that tradition from the prejudiced attacks of an alien world. In its way it is an admirable defense of the democratic way of life.

In Revolutionary days the American states had been weak and disunited. All this has been done away with, however. "The Constitution of 1787 wrought a vital change in this system. The Americans now became one people in their institutions, as well as in their origin and in their feelings."[1] The best description of the results of that change will be found in The Federalist, the most satisfactory "textbook on the principles of the American government."[2] The basis of the American government is not the sacrifice of the individual to

1. Notions of the Americans, (New York, 1852), II, 153.
2. Ibid., I, 79.

the desires of the mass of men. Rather:[1]

> The great desideration of the social compact would then seem to be, to produce such a state of things as shall call the most individual enterprise into action, while it should secure a proper consideration for the interests of the whole.

American government is based on checks and balances, but "all power is the natural and necessary right of the people."[2] Though this theory of government is contrary to European principles it works satisfactorily in America. Cadwellader claims:[3]

> "The two houses of Congress are, and ever have been, living proofs that the majority of men are not disposed to abuse power when it is once fairly entrusted to them."

Does not a government of political equality mean a sacrifice of talents in a general levelling of society, the traveler asks himself? Is there not danger that the poor will abrogate the rights of the well-to-do? Observation shows that the case is otherwise. There are, he finds,[4]

> . . .everywhere the strongest evidences of a greater equality of condition than I remember ever before to have witnessed. Where this equality exists, it has an obvious tendency to bring the extremes of the community together. What the peasant gains the gentleman must in some measure lose. The colours get intermingled, where the shades in society are so much softened. . . . Institutions which serve to give a man pride in himself, sometimes lessen his respect for others: and yet I see nothing in a republican government that is at all incompatible with the highest

1. Notions., I, 95.
2. Ibid., II, 151.
3. Ibid., II, 27.
4. Ibid., I, 100-101.

> possible refinement. It is difficult to conceive that a state of things which has a tendency to elevate the less fortunate classes of our species, should necessarily debase those whose lots have been cast in the highest.

American equality produces a high standard of excellence rather than the mediocrity generally associated with a popular government. The chief reason for this, perhaps, is the educational system which gives nearly all the benefits of some formal learning. Scholars in the true sense are rare, certainly, but "the doctrine that instruction became dangerous to those who could not push learning to its limits, was never in fashion here."[1]

The American government is based on popular suffrage rather than property representation. Cadwallader explains the difference between the systems to his friend.[2]

> "There can be no doubt that, under a bald theory, a representation would be all the better if the most ignorant, profligate, and vagabond part of the community, were excluded from the right of voting. It is just as true, that if all the rogues and corrupt politicians, even including those who read Latin, and have well-lined pockets, could be refused the right of voting, the honest man would fare all the better. . . . We have come to the conclusion, that it is scarcely worth while to do so much violence to natural justice, without sufficient reason, as to disfranchise a man merely because he is poor. Though a trifling <u>qualification</u> of property may sometimes be useful. . . . There can be no greater fallacy than its <u>representation</u>. A man may be a voluntary associate in a

1. <u>Notions</u>, I, 107-108.

2. <u>Ibid</u>., I, 264-265.

> joint-stock company, and justly have a right to a participation in the management, in proportion to his pecuniary interest; but life is not a chartered institution."

Life, then, is not to be run on the principles of a stock company. If this be the case, what of the few rich and many poor? The obvious answer is that such a state of society should not exist. "When the numbers of those who have nothing, get to be so great as to make their voices of importance, it is time to think of some serious change."[1] This is Jeffersonian doctrine with a vengeance, even to the point of suggesting the necessity of revolution!

Are there no aristocrats here, no gentlemen, no better classes of citizens, the traveler asks himself? Certainly men of wealth, talent and family stand out here as they do elsewhere. But the possession of these bounties does not guarantee position or political power as it does in non-democratic nations. The American,[2]

> "whatever might be his name, fortune, or even personal endowments who should arrogate. . . [a] manner of superiority over his less fortunate countrymen-. . . would be in great danger of humiliation; but . . . he is [not] in any sense the less of a gentleman for the restraint."

The heritage of a great name is of advantage only if the merit of the ancestor accompanies the name. If this be not true,

1. Notions, I, 266.

2. Ibid., I, 81.

"an honourable name may become a matter of reproach, since, when the public esteem is once forfeited, the recollection of the ancestor only serves to heighten the demerit of his delinquent child".[1] Money frequently serves to purchase position in the world; even Americans are affected by this failing to some extent. "It is true that when money is united to merit and talent . . . it can do more than when the latter qualities stand unsupported by so powerful an ally.". . . but to say "that money places man in power, or at the head of society," is unjust and absurd.[2] Cadwallader insists: "'. . . it is possible for a community to be so constituted as to limit the superiority of mere money; and if such a community exists on the globe it exists here.'"[3] Property is respected in its rights but has no special privilege.[4]

> Beyond this the law leaves every man . . . on grounds of perfect equality. This equality is, however, an equality of rights only; since talents, money, and enterprise . . . produce their natural effects, and no more.

Aristocracies, recognizing the fallacy in the hereditary principle, prevent the dissipation of the ruling class's power by entailing its property. In the absence of such artificial

1. Notions, I, 157.
2. Ibid., II, 315.
3. Ibid., II, 316.
4. Ibid., II, 333.

restraints,[1]

> "property will regulate itself. . . It will change hands often and become the reward of industry, talent and enterprise. . . . There are thousands of rich men here, and of very rich men too, and there is not a class of the community that has less political power."

Indeed if there is any danger at all it is that the people might find means to confiscate the goods of the wealthy. "Neither case is likely to occur, however, since the danger is scarcely within the bounds of a reasonable probability."[2]

America's aristocracy then, is not one of hereditary right. It approaches John Adams' ideal of wealth and talents to a certain extent, yet on the whole it might seem to be closer to the Jeffersonian aristocracy of intellect. This aristocracy has neither privileges nor political power. It can and does serve as a guiding force in language, morals, dress and deportment, "for it is the great peculiarity of our institutions to give more influence to talents than to any other one thing."[3] Cooper's democratic enthusiasm is undoubtedly affecting his good sense here to some extent. He had seen at close hand the practical benefits of inherited wealth and name. Family probably was of greater consideration in his own New York than in any part of the Union at this time. It is true that all doors were not opened at the Sesame of an old name, but

1. Notions, II, 336-337.

2. Ibid., II, 337. Later Cooper was to change his mind on this last point in view of the "anti-rent" agitation in New York.

3. Ibid., II, 124-125.

possession of such a name, with accompanying wealth, smoothed the path to success in many branches of endeavor.

It is not to be supposed that even an imaginary European traveller could find no faults with this country. Perhaps the most glaring contradiction in terms was the presence of slavery in a democratic nation. The institution, he tells us, is generally deplored and on the decline. The chief stumbling block in the path of ending slavery, of course, was the large investment tied up in the system. "I think no candid man will deny the difficulty of making two or three millions of people, under any circumstances, strip themselves generally of half their possessions, and in many instances of all."[1] This is the chief disadvantage. Also the negro race, half-sunk in savagery, is undeniably inferior to the white in present stage of development. But even so the institution is barbarous and should be abolished eventually.[2]

> That men, equally degraded, exist under systems that do not openly avow the principle of domestic slavery, is no excuse for the perpetuation of such a scourge, though circumstances and necessity may urge a great deal in extenuation of its present existence.

The legal system of the country comes in for some criticism too. Punishments are rather too lenient he feels.

1. Notions, II, 261.

2. Ibid., I, 276, 277. Cooper's defense of slavery as an existing institution here is very similar to his answer to J.C.L. de Sisimondi's article in the Revue Encyclopedique for January 1827. Cf. Robert E. Spiller, ed., "Fenimore Cooper's defense of slave-owning America," American Historical Review, XXXV (April, 1930), 575-583.

Respect for the law, since it emanates from the will of the people, is unusually great here. All the more reason, then, for society to punish, not for the reformation of the offender, but for its own protection.[1] Another criticism which may be made of the legal system is not so serious:[2]

> The number of lawyers is undeniably an evil; but besides being an evil which is likely to correct itself, it is one that is not without its advantages. They serve to keep alive an active knowledge of their rights among the people; and although much abused as pettifoggers, they make, in common, exceedingly useful and intelligent local legislators.

In literature and the arts, America undoubtedly lags behind Europe. This is due, not to her democratic institutions, but to the comparative youth of the nation. Already she has produced some writers known to Europe, Washington Irving, Brockden Brown, Fitzgreen Halleck and "the author of a series of tales, which were intended to elucidate the history, manners, usages and scenery of his native country," (i.e. Cooper himself).[3] True the nation has not yet had much influence in the field of literature, but,[4]

> . . . when it does begin to be felt, it will be felt with a force, a directness, and a common sense in its application that has never yet been known. . . The example of America has been silently operating on Europe for half a century; but its doctrines and its experience, exhibited with the understanding of those familiar with both, have never yet been pressed

1. Notions, II, 252.
2. Ibid., II, 212.
3. Ibid., I, 254.
4. Ibid., II, 122.

> on our attention. I think the time for the experiment is drawing near.

In the arts America has also lagged. We have produced some excellent portrait painters, Smibert and Copley, among others. The landscapes of Cole are creditable. However America's future lies not in the fine, so much as the useful, arts.[1]

> Though there is scarce such a thing as a capital picture in this whole country, I have seen more beautiful, graceful, and convenient ploughs in positive use here, than are probably to be found in the whole of Europe united. In this single fact may be traced the history of the character of the people, and the germ of their future greatness. . . . The vast multitude of their inventions, as they are exhibited in the Patent Office in this city (Washington), ought to furnish food for grave reflection to every stranger.

Prophetic words these, and indicative of how well Cooper understood the genius of his country. He clearly perceived the role of industry in America's future greatness. Indeed, with the most intelligent population in the world and great natural resources, it was unthinkable that America should for long be dependent on foreign nations for her needs. "The question of manufactures is . . . purely one of time. . . .They are now manufacturing almost every article of familiar use, and very many of them, much better than the articles that are imported. They even begin to export."[2] A nation situated as the United States is must develop manufactures. A tariff policy may be wise at first to stimulate this growth.[3]

> If restrictive laws shall be necessary to affect

1. Notions, II, 114-116.
2. Ibid., II, 328
3. Ibid., II, 329

> it, the people will allow of a lesser evil to get rid of a greater. When the manufacturers of America have once gotten fairly established so that practice has given them skill, and capital has accumulated a little, there will be no fear of foreign competition.

This attitude seems a far cry from Jefferson's philosophy of discouraging industry and favoring agriculture. Cooper, however much he loved the soil, did not have Jefferson's abhorence of cities, the spawn of industrial establishments. A nationalist, like Jackson, he supported the tariff as a means of building up America into a great independent nation. Throughout his works there is a constant sniping at those who engage in commerce and financial speculation; he was Jeffersonian enough to despise dependence upon paper profits as a means of livelihood. The manufacturer, like the farmer, combined his labor with nature's bounty to produce wealth for the common benefit. Hence, in this stage of our national development, a Jeffersonian might very well support Hamilton's protective system!

The traveler concludes with a discussion of world politics and the future of democratic America. The tendency in modern life is toward natural rights to the neglect of cherished institutions. Occasionally this movement has been accompanied by revolution,[1]

> "but revolution is a dangerous remedy. The Americans had no revolution, strictly speaking; they have only preceded the rest of Christendom in their

1. Notions, II, 339.

> reforms . . . If they have gone farther than it may be wise for other nations to follow it is no reason that they are not safe themselves."

America has nothing to fear from her institutions: The democratic way of life is working to produce an active and intelligent population; freedom for the individual is greater here than in any other part of the globe. Though not productive in the polite arts as yet, the nation gives great promise for the future. Already we have an inkling of her industrial capacity. To the Jeffersonian concept that the state based on the dignity of the individual is indeed happy, is grafted the Western optimism of Jackson. In later years this was to be called "manifest destiny". In 1828 there was no such convenient tag but the philosophy is the same. The closing of the Notions is a remarkable statement of the unbounded confidence in the future typical of the period.[1]

> A new era is now about to dawn on this nation. It has ceased to creep; it begins to walk erect among the powers of the earth. All these things have occurred within the life of man. Europeans may be reluctant to admit the claims of a competitor that they knew so lately a pillaged, a wronged, and a feeble people; but Nature will have her laws obeyed, and the fulfillment of things must come. The spirit of greatness is in this nation: Its means are within their grasp; and it is as vain as it is weak to attempt to deny results that every year is rendering more plain, more important, and more irresistible.

What better answer could be made to petty European carping at the lack of manners and "tone" in American society? Polite attainments are no match for naked power, political

1. Notions, II, 347.

and economic, power America is irresistibly gathering to itself.

The Notions was Cooper's first explicit statement of the democratic faith. It was followed by two novels in the romantic vein, one (The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish, 1829) a tale of frontier New England, the other (The Water Witch, 1830) a sea story; but his thought was cast in other directions. He became interested in politics, European and American. Soon he was to write a series of "European" novels, based on republican themes.

Europe and Political Liberalism

His friendship with Lafayette had grown steadily. There was a real meeting of the minds in these sturdy republicans, one at the height of his powers, the other a relic, though still active, of the great days of the Revolution. In 1828 Cooper had said of Lafayette, "His devotion to the cause of America was a devotion to the interests of humanity. . . . He dedicated youth, person and fortune, to the principles of liberty."[1] After the July Revolution he wrote Mrs. Cooper,[2]

> All is quiet in France and promises to remain so. Lafayette has yielded to necessity, and the Bourbonites have done the same thing. . . . The new Charta, as they call a constitution, is partly republican, and if they destroy the descent of the peers, which they talk, it will be still more so.

Six days later he was in Paris and wrote, (again to Mrs. Cooper):[3]

> I have not yet seen the General, who is all in

1. Notions, II, 215.
2. Correspondence of James Fenimore Cooper, I, 184.
3. Ibid., I, 185.

> all here. He is universally admitted to be the most powerful man in France. That he might have made himself chief of the Government appears to be acknowledged all around. He is courted, flattered, feared, and respected. I have written to him, but thought it more delicate not to intrude.

Lafayette, however, called on Cooper when he wished aid in furthering the republican cause. The notable "finance controversy" was touched off by a smashing article in the Revue Britannique written by Emile Saulnier. In it he attempted to show that the governmental expenses of democratic America greatly exceeded those of monarchical France. The purpose was an attack on the liberal republicans led by Lafayette as well as on America. Cooper rushed into print with a series of answers rebuking Saulnier's thesis. He tells us in his published letter, To The American People, "I appeared in it (the finance controversy) at the earnest request of General Lafayette."[1] The rewards for this patriotism were not great. At home he was reviled by newspapers and periodicals; only the Democratic press supported him in his patriotic attempt to demolish the attacks of foreign slanderers. The Whigs apparently felt that patriotism was less important than an opportunity to attack the administration, an attitude that was to color their reviews of his later novels, The Bravo, The Heidenmauer, and The Headsman as well.[2]

1. Robert E. Spiller, "Fenimore Cooper and Lafayette: The Finance Controversy of 1831-1832," American Literature, III, (March 1931), 28-44.

2. Dorothy Waples, The Whig Myth of James Fenimore Cooper, (New Haven, 1938), 88-113.

Cooper also engaged in a campaign to aid the Poles, then revolting against Russia, in conjunction with Lafayette. There was an appeal To The American People for assistance in this campaign. Cooper was the chairman of the American Polish Committee in Paris. As such, he directed the collection and expenditure of funds to bolster up the weak revolt in Warsaw.[1]

His concern with political affairs is revealed in his correspondence for this period as well. In a letter to J. S. Skinner, 26 June 1831, he wrote,[2]

> There is a deep conspiracy of Aristocrats who are striving to keep all they can from the people in England and France. . . . the more we can bring the men of education together in America, the better for us all. We have only ourselves to rely on, depend upon it, Europe to a nation is against us.

America should be diligent in putting down any pretensions to aristocracy he felt. Political power for a select group must never develop here; he wrote Samuel Rogers in 1831:[3]

> The nation shows all proper deference to education and character; when these are united to money and discreetly used they are of necessity still more certain of notice. Jefferson was the man to whom we owe the high lesson that the natural privileges of a social aristocracy are in truth no more than their natural privileges. With us, all questions of

1. Robert E. Spiller, "Fenimore Cooper and Lafayette: Friends of Polish Freedom, 1830-1832, "American Literature, VII, (March, 1935), 56-75.

2. Robert E. Spiller, "Fenimore Cooper: Critic of his Times. New Letters from Rome and Paris, 1830-31," American Literature I, (May, 1929), 142-144.

3. Ibid., 136

> personal rights, except in the case of the poor slaves, are effectually settled, and yet every really valuable interest is as secure as it is anywhere else.

He had presented a friendly but not partisan estimate of Jackson in 1828.[1] He now became more warm in his admiration. Charles Wilkes wrote him in 1830,[2]

> I cannot quite agree with you about General Jackson - altho' I am quite ready to believe he is as good as Adams was. His speech deserves the praise you give us-. . . -but I do not think his conduct. . .(to be) what was expected from his previous character.

The next year, William Dunlap wrote in the same vein, "the notion expressed of General Jackson is I fear too favorable. . . yet those who hold under him will hold to him and strive to hold him up."[3] A Carolinian friend, H. N. Cruger, took him to task for his support of the tariff. After a long exposition of the Calhoun doctrine of State sovereignty, he complains:[4]

> The words of this part of your letter are "all the North asks of the South is a <u>light</u> and <u>temporary</u> sacrifice until we can organize and mature our means." . . . you suggest that we should waive the question of the constitutionality of the tariff and take up our position upon its expediency, altho' you are yourself in its favor on the latter ground. . . . England you mention as an instance of the advantages of the restrictive policy. Would you defend their Corn Laws? . . . [Is not the argument in favor of the tariff] just as applicable to the English nobleman's monopoly of

1. <u>Notions</u>, II, 176-184
2. <u>Correspondence of James Fenimore Cooper</u>, I, 181.
3. <u>Ibid</u>., I, 241.
4. <u>Ibid</u>., I, 214-221.

> the Corn market, as it is to the Yankee manufacturer's monopoly of the American market.

To which Cooper could only reply in the vein of his letter to William Shubrick of 1 May 1831. "But all your people are a little mad on the subject of the tariff. It is odd that they do not see that their interests are secured by having manufactures in the country."[1]

Reaction to Aristocracy

His travels throughout Europe had given Cooper experience with new materials for fiction. Here were the great scenic wonders of the world and here were venerable civilizations, with relics of cultures even more ancient yet visible. As a liberal he looked on European institutions with dismay. Contact with Continental politics acted as a catalytic agent; the reaction served to sharpen his republican sympathies, to crystallize his thought along lines of critical analysis. What better way to show his countrymen the true relationship between the old and the new worlds than through his novels? The first of the works written with this end in view was The Bravo (1831), an attack on the artificial republicanism of aristocratic Venice. Cooper tells us this novel was well-received at first but soon lost favor.[2]

It was subsequently attacked on account of its favor-

1. American Literature, I (May, 1929), 140.

2. Marcel Clavel, Fenimore Cooper and his Critics, (Aix-en-Provence, 1938), 394.

> ing popular rights. . . I was abused as a deserter from my country, and all sorts of silly twaddle was uttered, for laying the scene of this book in Venice. . . . Au reste, The Bravo is perhaps, in spirit, the most American book I ever wrote, but thousands in this country, who clamor about such things, do not know American principles when they meet them, unless it may happen to be in a Fourth of July oration.

The novel's chief success was in France where, by the time of Cooper's death, it had appeared in six French (and one English) editions. During the same period there were five American and four English editions or printings.[1]

The hero of the first of Cooper's anti-aristocratic European novels, Jacopo Frontoni, has the false reputation of a bravo or hired assassain. Actually he is an unwilling employee of the Venetian state; in return for his services, he is allowed to visit his aged father, a political prisoner in the Venetian prison. The villain of the story is the state itself, a corrupted, aristocratic government based on intrigue and naked power. Though Venice makes claims for her republicanism and her justice, she is in fact ruled by a heartless, selfish aristocracy whose whole concern is the preservation of the power and wealth of its own members. Criticism of the state is punished more swiftly and more sharply than real crime. The aged fisherman Antonio, who has, in his simple desire to save his young grandson from the galleys of the fleet, offended the rulers of St. Mark, is quietly assassinated for his pains.

1. Spiller and Blackburn, op. cit., 56-57.

To serve the cause of "justice" Jacopo, the "bravo", once he has outlived his usefulness to the state, is publicly executed for crimes committed by others. This is the type of government to be expected in a country where the people mean nothing and the ruling class everything.

This "aristocratic republic" has different laws for the rich and the poor. The latter are oppressed by the former to the extent that the miserable population lives in a state of forced gayety, not knowing whom to trust. From the most magnificent mansion to the humblest meeting place of the lower classes, the city is shot through with spies and informers. Venice is in a state of profound decay as Cooper shows in his descriptive passages: "The noiseless steps and the air of silent mistrust among the domestics, added to the gloomy grandeur of the apartment, renders the abode no bad type of the republic itself."[1] Class rule demands injustice and, when it is united to hypocrisy, breeds moral degeneracy. Venice is definitely an aristocratic state with clearly marked class distinctions. Signor Gradenigo, one of the leaders of the state, remarks on this score: "Nothing can be more useful than to give to each class in society a proper sense of its obligations, and a just sentiment of its duties."[2] The lower classes are to serve the state without questioning her policies; the upper

1. The Bravo, The Works of J. Fenimore Cooper, ten volumes (New York, 1893), X, 436.

2. Ibid., 437.

class is to serve the state by membership in her councils and by formulating these policies. Among these policies is the necessity for the repression of free speech for, as Signor Gradenigo tells Jacopo, ". . . the paternal care of the Senate cannot see discontent planted in the bosom of a class it is their duty and pleasure to render happy."[1] Such was the ironical attitude of influential Venetians towards their venerable institutions.

The corrosive effect of a repressive policy on the mass of the population is shown clearly when the crowds revile the aged Antonio as he competes in the gondola race against men of higher social stations. All sorts of abuses are showered upon the poverty-stricken, weathered, old fisherman as he works his gondola to overcome the advantages possessed by his young, gayly-clad fellow-contestants.[2]

> It was not that the owners of these lordly piles indulged in the unfeeling triumph, but of their dependants, constantly subject themselves to the degrading influence of a superior presence, let loose the long-pent torrents of their arrogance on the head of the first unresisting subject which offered.

This turning of the populace against one of themselves is clearly a result of aristocratic oppression, "for human nature has a secret longing to revenge itself on the weak for all the injuries it has received at the hands of the strong."[3] In a free country, a true republic such as the United States, the

1. The Bravo, 467.
2. Ibid., 467.
3. Ibid., 555.

citizen will defer to superior virtue, education, and experience of his own will because he is secure against alienations of his natural rights. Further:[1]

> ". . .there is more security against popular violence and popular insults in these free states, than in any other country on earth, for there is scarcely a citizen so debased as not to feel that, in assuming the appearance of a wish to revenge the chances of fortune, he is making an undue admission of inferiority.

Venice is not a republic at all, no matter how much she may glory in the name. Anti-republicans have frequently predicted that the American experiment must fail as ignobly as had the Italian soi-disant republics. Your true republic "strictly implies the representation and supremacy of the general interests, . . .not the protection and monopolies of privileged classes."[2] Venice can not, by any stretch of the imagination, fall within this definition.[3]

> Venice had no doctrine of divine right, and as her prince was little more than a pageant, she boldly laid claim to be called a republic. She believed that a representation of the most prominent and brilliant interests in society was the paramount objective of government, and, faithful to the seductive but dangerous error, she mistook to the last collective power for social happiness.

Venice was, then, not a republic but "a narrow, a vulgar, and an exceedingly hearless oligarchy."[4] A despot may be enlightened;

1. The Bravo, 555.
2. Ibid., 477.
3. Loc. cit.
4. Ibid., 478.

a popular government is subject to human impulses; but an aristocracy is bound to be selfish in that is places the interests of a select group before those of the whole. "It partakes . . . of the selfishness of all corporations, in which the responsibility of the individual . . . is lost in the subdivision of numbers."[1] The crux of any argument in favor of aristocracy is the social stake theory - the idea that representation of large property interests in government will provide protection for all property rights. Unfortunately he whose interest is represented is more careful in looking after his own property than in providing for the general welfare. With a man situated as Signor Gradenigo, these considerations were supreme and ". . . it would be difficult, even in this money-getting age, to find a more zealous convert to the opinion that property was not a subordinate, but the absorbing interest of civilized life."[2]

The Venetian political system was based on rule by a hereditary aristocracy, as we have seen. The lowest branch of the government was the Senate in which membership was conferred by birth. Since this body was numerous and consequently lacking in flexibility, a portion of its membership was chosen to make up the Council of Three Hundred which met to decide the ordinary matters of state. From this group there was elected a Council of Ten, older statesmen who guided the work of the larger

1. The Bravo, 478.
2. Ibid., 449.

group. From these select few there was chosen, by lot, the secret Council of Three. This body had the highest of powers and was subject to no external control. Once selected, its members were supreme in Venice, with life and death powers over the populace, until their terms ran out. With such wide powers and the protection of anonymity, the Three were beyond all political and social pressure. The invitations to abuse of power were so great that is is not surprising that such should occur. "It appears to be an unavoidable general consequence that abuses should follow, when power is exercised by a permanent and irresponsible body, from whom there is no appeal."[1] Few men indeed could resist such an opportunity to advance their own interests at the expense of society in general. As Jacopo told Antonio: "The wants of the state are their conscience, though they take heed those wants shall do themselves no harm."[2] The moral of all this is plain enough. Venice is a false republic, an aristocracy, and her citizens, ruling and ruled, become depraved as a result of the system. In a true republic, America for instance, the citizens,[3]

> - will have a higher standard of private virtue than the subjects of any other form of government. . . and responsibility to public opinion . . . will prevent government from being . . . perverted into a terrible engine of corruption.

Cooper had gone out of his way to defend American ideals

1. The Bravo, 479.
2. Ibid., 502.
3. Ibid., 577.

of government in Notions of the Americans. Now he had continued the fight by attacking Europe. What was the reception at home given to this new effort? The impartial Southern Review found it an attack on the "Republic" of Venice but not a vindication of American ideals.[1] The American Monthly Magazine stated that Cooper had fallen off by indulging in political discussions. The Bravo is dull the reviewer concludes.[2] Frances Bowen, in the North American Review, a somewhat provincial journal, dismissed The Bravo as a novel "of a European character" and after criticizing Cooper's work generally went on to suggest:[3]

> There are copious materials for fiction in the adventurous history of the pilgrim settlers, and their immediate descendants, by using which, he will do better service to his countrymen and more honor to himself, than by retracing the worn tracks of European novelists, or speculating upon political topics of ephemeral interest.

In the face of these comments, the opinion of the ultranationalist American Quarterly Review is of interest. The reviewer recognizes The Bravo as a republican novel and goes on to say: "he has first ennobled American fiction by making it the vehicle of those leading American ideas which are the chief boast of the republic."[4]

1. "The Bravo", Southern Review, VIII (February, 1832), 382-399.

2. "The Headsman: Review", American Monthly Magazine, II (November, 1833), 195.

3. Frances Bowen, "Cooper's Novels and Travels", North American Review, XLVI (January, 1838), 19.

4. "Works of Fenimore Cooper," American Quarterly Review, XVII (June 1835), 411.

But harsh words from home were not to deter Cooper in his self-appointed task. On 25 May 1831 he wrote his nephew Richard Cooper, "Reviews give me little concern, whether favorable or the reverse. What I have written is written, as the Turks say, and it cannot be helped."[1] Already he was known as the American Scott. He had complained to the editor of the New Monthly of this practice stating that nicknames were offensive to him and that he was not a "rival of Sir Walter Scott."[2] He might have added that, much as he respected Scott's ability, he detested "the Wizard of the North's" Tory politics. In his next novel, The Heidenmauer (1832), he invaded Scott's own field, medieval Europe. For once the old criticism was to have some validity.[3]

> The Heidenmauer is not equal to The Bravo, but it is a good book and better than two thirds of Scott's. They may say it is like his if they please; they have said so of every book I have written, even The Pilot!
>
> But The Heidenmauer is like, and was intended to be like in order to show how differently a democrat and an aristocrat saw the same thing.

The scenery of the Rhine had charmed Cooper and his family in 1831 when, during a little sojourn from Paris, they had spent several days at Duerckhiem. Here they found a village with roots deep in the past, a ruined Abbey, an ancient castle, the remains of a Roman camp known as the "Heidenmauer" or

1. Correspondence of James Fenimore Cooper, I, 231.
2. Ibid., I, 227.
3. Ibid., I, 283 (Letter to S.F.B. Morse, 19 August 1832).

Pagan's Wall and a great cliff called by local legend the "Teufelstein" or Devil's stone. Here were materials for a medieval romance in profusion; The Heidenmauer resulted.

The Heidenmauer (or The Benedictines) is as Cooper suggested above a new view of the Middle Ages. In time, the scene is laid at the close of the medieval period, during the years when Luther's preachings were beginning to shake German society from top to bottom. In contrast to the glowing picture of life in the days of chivalry presented by Scott, Cooper underlines the weakness of the period. The corruption of religion is delineated in the bloated, worldly Abbot of Limburg and his coterie. Deference to worldly rank and authority exists even within the monastery itself. How different, really, are American ideals and those of Europe; there is no bowing and scraping in a free country before any titled lord.[1]

> The functionary that is literally a servant of the people, whatever may be his dispositions, can never triumph over his masters; . . . we need only examine the institutions to see that in this . . . there is no strict analogy between ourselves and European nations. . . . The remark has probably been made because a respect for official authority has been found among us, when there was the expectation, and possibly the wish, to find anarchy.

There was no such restraint on the inhabitants of Duerckheim; all, from the lowliest herder to the wealthy burgomaster, Heinrich Frey, courted and flattered Count Emich von Leiningen whenever he ventured from his castle at Hartenburg. The purse-

1. The Heidenmauer, The Works of J. Fenimore Cooper, ten volumes, (New York, 1893), X, 659.

proud Abbot did stand up to Emich, however, to dispute the possession of certain rights with him. The haughty noble was not one to brook opposition to his power, political and economic. Ambitious Heinrich was persuaded to gather the men of the town together and aid the Count and his own force in the reduction of the monastery. Such an attack on a religious institution was a serious step. The burghers, their awe of Mother Church somewhat shaken by the activities of Luther and their own interest (seemingly) about to be advanced, cast aside moral scruples. Like Emich, they felt the Abbey a restriction on their potential development. Cooper's concept of the rising middle class, as evidenced in his portrayal of Heinrich, is of interest in this respect.[1]

> He was a firm believer in that dictum which says none but the wealthy have sufficient interest in society to be entrusted to its control, though his own instinct might have detected the sophistry, since he was daily vacillating between opposing principles just as they happened to affect his own particular concerns. He gave freely to the mendicant, and to the industrious; but when it came to be a question of any serious melioration of the lot of either, he shook his head . . . and uttered shrewd remarks on the bases of society and of things as they were established.

Heinrich and his compatriots differ little from the robber baron himself. The warrior's claims are based on birth and force; theirs depend on birth and shrewdness. In a sense, the Count is the superior for he has had the advantages of breeding and education, of a rough sort albeit. For all his crude nature

1. The Heidenmauer, 659-660.

he represents the best the society had to offer; he can be little better than the people from which he springs.[1]

> . . . where the base of the pillar is rude and little polished, it would be a violation of all architectural keeping to expect a capital of a different style. Thus it is that we, without any social orders but those of convention, are struck with so many glaring discrepancies among people whose patricians, having studied all that is factitious and plausible in breeding, are still deficient in the grand essentials of reason and humanity, simply because the roots of the society, of which they are only the more luxuriant branches, are planted in the soil of ignorance and debasement.

Emich received help, not only from the interested townsmen, but also from two clerical visitors at his castle in his ruthless attack on the monastery. His cousin Albrecht, a Knight Hospitaller of St. Johns, explains his part in hostilities against the Church he was sworn to defend as being the required duty of a guest to his host under the laws of hospitality! Cooper comments that this type of rationalization still is with us:[2]

> . . . principles, that were common enough in that age . . . have descended in a different form to our own, since we daily see men, in the gravest affairs of a nation, putting their morality at the disposal of party, rather than incur the odium of being wanting in this species of social faith.

Cooper had promised to show how differently a democrat and an aristocrat see the same thing. Perhaps his best statement of the feudal society's repression of the masses is contained in the following conversation between the count and the

1. The Heidenmauer, 680.
2. Ibid., 769.

burgomaster.[1]

> ". . . for, with thee, I deem the time serious for all lovers of established order, and of the peace of mankind. What would the knaves, that they thus trouble thy authority?, says Emich. Are they not fed and clad? and do they not now possess privileges out of number? The greedy rogues, if left to their humors, would fain envy their betters each delicate morsel they carry to their mouths, or each drop of generous rhenish that moistens their lips!"
>
> "I fear, well-born Emich, that this spirit of covetousness is in their vile natures! I have rarely consented to any little yielding to their entreaties . . . that the taste of the indulgence hath not given a relish for a fuller fare. No; he that would govern quietly, and at his own ease, must govern thoroughly; else we all become illiterate savages, fitter for the forests of the Indies, than our present rational and charitable civilization."

There is a poetic justice in the circumstance that Heinrich Frey, originally a man of the people, should find his own philosophy turned against him. With the expulsion of the Benedictines, the balance of power in the valley was upset; the town gained, not liberty but a new, more powerful, and unopposed master. The Count soon put the town in its "proper place", subservience to the castle. Such was life in the romantic Middle Ages.

The Heidenmauer received a slightly less favorable reception than The Bravo. Its greatest successes were scored at home and in Germany where there were issued six and five editions, respectively. Nothing daunted, Cooper continued the attack. The Swiss republics were most often compared to the

1. The Heidenmauer, 677.

United States as being of similar character. In his last "European novel," The Headsman (1833), he set out to demolish that concept.

In the summer of 1832 the Cooper family had gone to Switzerland for a stay of several months. While there he had become acquainted with a Swiss boatman, Jean Descloux, of sturdy democratic ideals. Part of a conversation between the two lovers of liberty, recorded in the Preface to The Headsman, outlines the essence of Cooper's political thought.[1]

> "If one man rule, he will rule for his own benefit and that of his parasites; if a minority rule, we have many masters instead of one" (honest Jean had got hold here of a cant saying of the privileged, which he very ingeniously converted against themselves) "all of whom must be fed and served; and if the majority rule, and rule wrongfully, why, the minimum of harm is done." He admitted that the people might be deceived to their own injury, but then he did not think it was quite as likely to happen, as that they should be oppressed when they were governed without any agency of their own. On these points the American (Cooper) and the Vaudois were absolutely of the same mind.

With these concepts firmly in mind, he proceeded to examine the Swiss past. Despite her tradition of liberty, he found there hereditary privilege and oppression of the worst sort. The theme is that of The Bravo again, the evils of aristocracy and the anomaly of an aristocratic class in a republic. In this case, however, the aristocrats suffer too; the fault is not so much with the men as with the system. In the Swiss republics all office and station was hereditary. For

1. The Headsman, The Works of J. Fenimore Cooper, (New York, 1893), X, 4.

centuries the de Bloney family had lived in a castle overlooking the Leman. For an almost equal length of time the Müller family had been condemned to the revolting office of headsman or state executioner. The plot revolves around the love between Adelhaid Willading, a daughter of a noble family of Berne, and Sigismund Steinbach, a young soldier. The latter is really (it seems) the son of Balthazar Müller, the headsman of Berne and subject to that hereditary office himself. In time, the youth proves to be the lost son of Gaetano Grimaldi (Baron de Willading's oldest friend and the Doge of Genoa to boot), kidnapped in his infancy. But it is only such a tremendous manipulation of plot that makes the marriage possible, in spite of Sigismund's enjoying the deep respect of Adelhaid's father as well as her own deep love.

During the course of untangling this web of circumstance, the Swiss system of government comes in for its share of severe criticism.[1]

> . . . the municipal aristocracy of the canton. . .found its institutions venerable, just, and if one might judge from their language, almost sacred, simply because it had been in possession of certain exclusive privileges under their authority, that were not only comfortable in their exercise but fecund in other worldly advantages.

Baron de Willading asks, "Are we not a republic? - is not the right of the bürgerschaft the one essential right in Berne? . . ." Adelhaid replies, ". . . it is true that we are inhabitants of a republic, but we are not the less noble."[2]

1. The Headsman, 57.

2. Ibid., 67.

That is the stumbling block: how can hereditary office, be it low or high, be reconciled with republican institutions. Sigismund, as the central figure in this snare, cries out against the system which has blasted his hopes:[1]

> . . . who would not wish to come of the brave, and honest, and learned . . . but what hope is left to one like me, who finds himself so placed that he can neither inherit nor transmit aught but disgrace! I do not affect to despise the advantages of birth, simply because I do not possess them; I only complain that artful combinations have perverted what should be sentiment and taste into a narrow and vulgar prejudice, by which the really ignoble enjoy privileges greater than those perhaps who are worthy of the highest honors man can bestow.

The dangers of concentrating privilege are exemplified in the Bailiff of Vevey, Peter Hofmeister, a stupid though not dangerous man. Peter doesn't like popular education because the masses are not properly equipped to employ the benefits of education.[2]

> "This is a free government, and a fatherly government, and a mild government. . . but this is not a government that likes reading and writing; reading that leads to the perusal of bad books, and writing that causes false signatures."

He goes on to remark that "'There is no more certain method to corrupt a community, and to rivet it in beastly practices, than to educate the ignorant.'"[3] Knowledge is power; to educate the ignorant man is equivalent to giving a child a loaded blunderbuss.

1. The Headsman, 83.
2. Ibid., 116.
3. Ibid., 117.

"'He is as likely to use it wrong end uppermost as in any other manner.'"[1] But Adelhaid expresses Cooper's feelings, when she says, "'. . . the world is governed by those whose interest it is to pervert truth to their own objects, and not by those whose duties run hand in hand with the right!'"[2] There is one law for the rich and another for the poor in a governmental system based on class distinctions. Maso, an Italian sailor and smuggler cries out at the world's false justice. Kicking a stone over a precipice, he remarks:[3]

> "That stone is as much master of its direction as the poor untaught being who is thrown upon the world, despised, unaided, suspected, and condemned even before he has sinned, has the command of his own course."

This is the fruit of despotism, even though that despotism may claim the honored name of republic.

Reception of the novel at home was disappointing. The North American complained that Cooper had written too fast and too much. His recent novels are so poor that, "were it not for some unlucky peculiarities of manner, they could hardly be ascribed, on internal evidence, to the same author."[4] The American Monthly felt The Headsman had failed in its purpose.

1. Loc. cit.
2. The Headsman, 132.
3. Ibid., 208.
4. F. Bowen, loc. cit., 6.

No matter what the state of society, a person of breeding would not allow the son of a hangman to sue for his daughter's hand the reviewer continued. Finally, "We see nothing outre or offensive in the dignity of the nobles of these republics."[1] This attitude was discouraging; perhaps it was time he went home. In 1828 he had written that an American who stayed abroad five years would get behind his country.[2] His old friend Peter Jay had written him the next year, "If you remain absent much longer you will be as little at home here as at Paris. Come back while you have some old friends left."[3] He had used up his five years and two to spare; it was time to see what America looked like after half a decade of Jackson. Accordingly, there was one last visit to England and then the trip home. When he landed in New York he had been away nearly seven and a half years.

This European period in Cooper's life is perhaps the most significant of all. He had arrived in Europe a romantic American democrat. Knowledge of Europe had made him prouder than ever of being an American. In his Notions of the Americans, he had defended America before the world; in The Bravo, The Heidenmauer and The Headsman he had attacked European institutions as inferior to those of America. In attacking Europe, he

1. American Monthly Magazine II, (November, 1833), 198.
2. Notions, I. 382.
3. Correspondence of James Fenimore Cooper, I, 173.

had picked, not the publicized despotisms, but the romantically idealized Middle Ages and the so-called republics of Venice and Switzerland. His course had opened new difficulties to be surmounted on his return. Many critics felt that he should avoid politics (particularly when the reviewers were Whigs, was this so) and avoid any praise of this country. Though dangerous to his reputation, this attitude was not likely to have much effect on his thought! However, in examining Europe (and her best at that) he had developed a critical faculty which could pierce through sham to the heart of a country and its institutions. On his return to America, he was to find that momentous changes had taken place during his absence. In comparison with the old, the new was to seem somewhat tawdry. Faults lightly passed over before were now to be examined more carefully, let the chips fall where they might. Already he had begun a satire on England and America but, since it was finished in America, it will be considered in the next chapter.

V HOMECOMING

Critics and Criticism

The Cooper family disembarked in New York, 5 November 1833, to find that a new America had grown up in their absence. The city itself was considerably larger than it had been before. Constant streams of emigrants were heading west from the rural districts. In New York State the old landlords of great holdings were losing their positions, social as well as political, under the impetus of democracy. Andrew Jackson has often been charged with delivering this country over to the masses; rather the reverse should be the true estimate. The groundswell of democracy had its first impetus in the election of Thomas Jefferson. Since then it had been steadily gaining way as new states with frontier egalitarian political concepts came into the Union. Gradually, in even the older, more well-established states, manhood suffrage replaced property requirements in qualifying voters. Concurrent with this was the development of demagoguery as the vote passed to men whose opinions were based not on careful judgment but on ignorance, bias and prejudice. Frequently such elements possessed the balance of power between the two parties with the obvious result that politicians on either side were willing to go to extreme lengths to capture this unpledged group.

The town of New York, largely mercantile in its interests, was strongly Whiggish in the cast of its political thought.

Being a Whig at this time meant first of all being anti-Jackson. Secondly it meant friendship with England and admiration for things English in many cases. Since many of the journals of public opinion and literary reviews were under Whig influence at this date, these attitudes were reflected in the literary world. Reviews of the works of American authors were frequently based less on their merits than on the political affiliations of the author. One of their weapons was an attack on the excessive patriotism of men like Cooper. The North American Review had levelled this criticism at Cooper as early as 1825 in its review of The Pilot as we have seen above. Cooper was aware of these changes that had taken place during his sojourn abroad but he had not yet given up hope. Ten days after he landed in New York he had already seen enough to be able to write to William Skinner:[1]

> I never expected my dear Sir, to be thanked for upholding American principles in face of the enemy. The truth will be understood some day, I make no doubt, but short as has been my residence here since our return, I have seen enough to be satisfied that, with the majority of those who affect to have opinions, anti-American sentiments are more in favor than American. The heart of the nation, however, is sound, or else God knows what would become of us. If I were anxious for popularity I should cut my throat in despair, but thinking, acting, and reasoning for myself I endeavor to make the best of it. I have been but once in what may be called society since my return, and then I was attacked by a man young enough to be my son and who was never out of sight of the smoke of his father's

1. James Fenimore Cooper, (ed.), The Correspondence of James Fenimore Cooper, I (New Haven, 1922), 328.

> chimney, for thinking like an American. . . . But I sicken of this ungrateful subject.

Thus far it seemed that the trouble with the country was to be laid at the door of the well-educated. The finance controversy opened again in the New York American in early December. Cooper wrote his wife that he intended to write an answer; a "plain dignified statement of the facts is all that is required," he felt.[1] This was the height of the struggle between Jackson and the Bank and feeling ran high in New York's commercial centers against the upstart from the West who dared meddle in the sacred realms of finance. Cooper, however, supported the President:[2]

> Everybody is talking of money, or rather of no money, but that is to be expected in a place like this, where the first effort of everybody is to make money, and the second to spend it. Your big bank makes but an indifferent figure in the report of the Government directors, and I begin to believe that hickory will prove stronger than gold.

Along with these political notions was the unpleasant fact that, lightly as he might regard the opinions of reviewers, their unfriendly attitude was costing him public support and money. "My own means are very limited" he wrote his sister Anna, though "my income as a writer, has been considerable."[3]

1. Correspondence of James Fenimore Cooper, I, 330, letter to Mrs. Cooper 11 December 1833.

2. Ibid., I, 331.

3. Correspondence of James Fenimore Cooper, I, 333 letter to Mrs. George Pomeroy, 28 March 1834.

Finally Cooper decided to strike back at his critics, to vindicate his own actions. The slanders that had been hurled at him would have been sufficient to goad a greater man into retaliation, still the part of wisdom would have been to remain silent. Nevertheless in June, 1834 there appeared a slim volume entitled A Letter to His Countrymen. First he denied having any connection with or any previous knowledge of any favorable critical opinion on himself or his works. He then went on to state he had never received any compensation for his writings other than "The Tales and the Letters on America."[1] After explaining his part in the finance controversy, he proceeded to defend The Bravo. The struggle in Europe today was not between monarchy and democracy but between the latter and aristocracy. Consequently he had determined to write "a series of tales, in which American opinion should be brought to bear on European facts."[2] Though he has been accused of bad taste in writing such a book in France he must be freed of such a dubious accusation since he "did not cause the Bravo to be published in France at all."[3] He then went further to show that foreign opinion, often quoted in America, was frequently malicious, based on some real or imagined slight. "The practice of deferring to foreign opinion is dangerous to the

1. James Fenimore Cooper, A Letter to his Countrymen, 224, Appendix of England, III (London, 1837), 219-312.

2. Ibid., 232.

3. Ibid., 239.

institutions of the country", he feels.[1]

Instead of drawing false analogies between our system of government and those of European nations we would do better to recognize the "necessity of construing the Constitution of the United States on its own principles."[2] A case in point is the recent controversy over the Senate's resolution condemning Jackson for removing the deposits from the Bank, for here writers in support of the Senate's action have quoted Burke, De Lolme, Hallam, Pitt, Fox and other foreign writers and speakers rather than the Constitution. The American legislature, unlike that of England, is not composed of "sentinels to watch the executive merely, but. . . of public servants the most likely to exceed their delegated authority."[3] Indeed, "if this Union shall ever be destroyed by any faults or errors of an internal origin, it will not be by executive, but by legislative usurpation."[4] Enough of this dependence on foreign opinion; let us judge our government on its own principles.

There are other and even more powerful examples of this false doctrine at work here. In defiance of both the letter and spirit of our laws, some have affected the right to influence the vote of those in their employ. This is nothing less "than maintaining the doctrine of the representation of

1. A Letter to his Countrymen, 253.
2. Ibid., 268.
3. Ibid., 283.
4. Ibid., 290.

property in its worst . . . form"[1]

Our habit of deferring to foreign nations has not brought us respect abroad; "there is not another nation in Christendom whose people enjoy less positive favor than our own."[2] Furthermore such a dependence on the opinions of others has caused us to lose a proper respect for our own admirable institutions.[3]

> There is an impatience of existing practical evils that causes many of the best-disposed men of this nation to overlook the real merits of the great question that is now agitating Christendom. No one will deny that we have our own particular causes of complaint, and that a very great portion of them are the offspring of democracy. Were it not for this we should be perfect. All the evil that is dependent on polity, and which is peculiarly our own, has this origin. It can leave no other, for there is no monarch nor aristocracy (practically and politically considered), to produce a different. But let him who has known both England and America intimately, compare the disadvantages of the systems; and, if, an honest and a sensible man, he will tell you to be content with your lot. Artful, intriguing demagogues get uppermost among us too often, beyond a doubt but where do they not? The difference between a demagogue and a courtier is not worth disputing about. We have the certainty of knowing that when such men do arrive at power, they are reduced to something very near the minimum of harm; whereas in other countries the abuse is pretty sure to be made at the expense of a very great majority.

Finally the poor reception granted his attempts to substitute American Principles for American things has led him to

1. A Letter to his Countrymen, 295.
2. Ibid., 299.
3. Ibid., 300-301.

the point where he must lay his pen down, though reluctantly.[1]

> . . . I am not ashamed to avow, that I have felt a severe mortification that I am to break down on the question of distinctive American thought. Were it a matter of more than feeling, I trust I should be the last to desert my past. But the democracy of this country is in every sense strong enough to protect itself. Here, the democrat is the conservative; and, thank God! he has something worth preserving. I believe he knows it and that he will prove true to himself.

The heart of the country is yet sound he had said six months before. It was still so now; the difficulties came from the mercantile class not from the honest farmers and workmen. He wrote Mrs. Cooper in this vein, 12 June 1834, from the Mohawk valley.[2]

> Here and there the Yankees have got in and wrought a change, but on the whole it is less changed than I had anticipated.
> . . . I believe I asked a dozen boatmen this evening questions concerning their voyages, and in every instance I met with a civil, prompt, and intelligent answers. In one instance a man misunderstood my question and answered wrong; then, recollecting himself, he walked the length of his boat to correct himself. Every hour I stay at home convinces me more and more that society has had a summerset, and that the elite is at the bottom!

Two years later he was to express similar notions in a letter to Horatio Greenough. Complaining of foreign influence he explains that he does not mean the simple Irish Immigrants, "but the merchants and others a degree below them, who are almost to a man hostile in feeling to the country, and to all her interests, except as they may happen to be their

1. A Letter to his Countrymen, 306-307.

2. Correspondence of James Fenimore Cooper, I, 340.

interests"[1] The Letter had caused a great furore among his critics that was not likely to endear him further to the press or the arbiters of literary taste of his native land. Perhaps the most friendly was the American Quarterly which felt that his personal and political complaints were not necessary, that the idea of subservience to foreign opinion had been exaggerated and that, in short, Cooper was excessively sensitive. Indeed, the majority of his countrymen, proud of his contributions to their literature, did not "take sides against him and their own land, with Louis Philippe, Wellington, and Metternick."[2]

A Satirical Experiment

Cooper had decided to cease writing in 1834. However, in July 1835, The Monikins, a satire he had started several years before in Europe, was given to the public. What caused his change of heart we cannot tell since the Correspondence is silent on the subject. At any rate, his latest production brought new heaps of abuse on his head; from the date of publication to the present few have had anything favorable to say of The Monikins. Lounsbury confesses, "To the immense majority of even the author's admirers, it has been from the very beginning a sealed book."[3] Friends have damned the work with faint praise

1. Correspondence of James Fenimore Cooper, I, 359.

2. "Works of Fenimore Cooper," American Quarterly Review, XVII (June 1835), 429.

3. Thomas R. Lounsbury, James Fenimore Cooper, (Boston, 1889), 133.

while enemies have been less gentle. The Southern Literary Messenger remarked that it "has few traces of our author's manner, and was limited in its popularity."[1] Francis Bowen, in the North American, dismissed it as a "novel of a European character."[2] Twelve years later the same critic in the same journal showed violent antagonism to the satire.[3]

> Mr. Cooper's literary existence properly terminated with the publication of The Monikins, a novel of which it is not possible to say much, as we have never read it, and never met with any individual who had. It was the close of a lamentable series of fictions, the scenes of which were supposed to take place on European ground, and to embody the results of the author's observation while abroad.

What is the nature of a book that was so bad that it might be condemned without being read?

The Monikins, like most satires, is written on two levels, to wit: the introductory material and the description of the strange monikin countries of Leaphigh and Leaplow. At the beginning the narrator, Sir John Goldencalf, explains his lineage and the events which led to his visit to the monikins. Sir John's father, Thomas Goldencalf, had been a foundling who made himself into one of the richest men in England. In his poverty-stricken youth he was somewhat of a radical, but, when

1. "Biographical Sketch of James Fenimore Cooper," Southern Literary Messenger, IV (1838), 378.

2. F. Bowen, "Cooper's Novels and Travels," North American Review, XLVI (January, 1838), 5.

3. F. Bowen, "Cooper's 'Ways of the Hour'", North American Review, LXXI (July, 1850), 122.

"he began to earn money for himself, as well as for his master, he ceased to cry 'Wilkes and liberty!'"[1] This tendency to political conservatism increased in direct proportion to his age and the growth of his bank account.[2]

> After he became worth a million, it was observed that all his opinions grew less favorable to mankind in general, and that he was much disposed to exaggerate the amount and quality of the few boons which Providence had dispersed on the poor. . . . for it must be a subject of common remark, that the more elevated and refined men become in their political ethics, the more they are accustomed to throw dirt on their neighbors.

Naturally such a father impressed on young John the great advantages of property. His tutor, Rev. Dr. Etherington, himself a clergyman of good family but no estate, assured John that it was not wealth ~~and~~ but lineage which counted in the world. With these two contradictory doctrines buzzing in his ears, young John was perplexed at the course he should take on finding his father's demise had left him the richest man in England.

He became interested in the social stake theory which held that men of large interests should rule the nation. This naturally led him to the purchase of the "rotten borough" at Householder. John's political mentor, Lord Pledge, had been unable to procure the money for the purchase himself. Consequently the sale had been "broken off at the very moment when it was of the utmost impatience to know to whom the independent

1. The Monikins, The Works of James Fenimore Cooper, ten volumes (New York, 1893), VII, 239.

2. Ibid., 247-248.

electors rightfully belonged," that is at election time.[1] John does not stand for election, deferring to Lord Pledge's announced candidacy, in return for which favor he is knighted and receives some valuable political instruction on the significance and meaning of the social stake theory.[2]

> ". . . a man without a proper stake in society is little better than the beasts of the fields. . . . Reason as you will, forward or backward, you arrive at the same result - he that hath nothing is usually treated by mankind little better than a dog, and he that is little better than a dog usually has nothing. Again. What distinguishes the savage from the civilized man? Why, civilization, to be sure. Now, what is civilization? The arts of life. What feeds, nourishes, sustains the arts of life? Money or property. By consequence, civilization is property, and property is civilization. If the control of a country is in the hands of those who possess the property, the government is a civilized government; but, on the other hand, if it is in the hands of those who have no property, the government is necessarily an uncivilized government. It is quite impossible that anyone should become a safe statesman who does not possess a direct property interest in society.

The young baronet was charmed by this beautiful theory, so cleverly presented. He determined to take up the social stake doctrine in a large way. The first step, he felt, would be to divide his wealth among diverse projects, for he says, "a multiplication of those interests will increase the stake, and render us more worthy of the trust."[3] The natural result of his world wide investments is an appeal to political power to

1. The Monikins, 260.
2. Ibid., 262.
3. Ibid., 266.

protect the types of property in which he is represented. He finds himself buying slaves in America and supporting a profitable philanthropy, the Philo-African-anti-compulsion-free labor Society in England, for instance. Truly his experiment was bearing fruit.[1]

> I could not but admire the virtue of the "social-stake system," which kept men so sensibly alive to their rights, let them live where they would, or under what form of government, which was so admirable suited to sustain truth and render us just.

By this time he has become acquainted with four monikins, whom he has delivered from slavery at the hands of a Savoyard organ-grinder by the simple expedient of purchase. These monikins are intelligent primates, related to but not of the family of monkeys. We will let their spokesman introduce to us their names and conditions.[2]

> ". . . this young nobleman is, in our own dialect, No. 6, purple; or to translate the appellation, my Lord Chatterino. This young lady is No. 4, violet, or my Lady Chaterissa. This excellent and prudent matron is No. 4,626,243, russet, or, Mistress Vigilance Lynx, to translate her appellation also into the English tongue; I am No. 22,817, brown-study color, or, Dr. Reasono, to give you a literal signification of my name -- a poor disciple of the philosophers of our race, an L.L.D., and a F.U.D.G.E., the travelling tutor of this heir of one of the most illustrious and the most ancient houses of the island of Leaphigh, in the monikin section of mortality."

Thus this class of quadrupeds or as they prefer to call themselves, tail-wavers, are cast into rigid political strata

1. The Monikins, 281.

2. Ibid., 285.

clearly indicated by their names. Since they are much advanced in the ways of civilization they have gotten beyond the need of wearing clothes. Indeed, Dr. Reasono asks Sir John to remove his own for fear of offending the delicacy of the ladies! In their own land their appellations are registered by being branded on their rears, an extremely useful practice since it simplifies the problem of collection of taxes which is the chief end of government, itself the chief end of society.

Sir John is so intrigued by these interesting details that he professes a wish to learn more by visiting Leaphigh, at the same time returning the monikins to their native habitat. An acquaintance, Captain Noah Poke, of "Stunnington," Connecticut, is persuaded to fit out a vessel (at Sir John's expense) for the journey. After a somewhat lengthy voyage, they arrive in the Antarctic region, the native home of the monikins being in a land behind the ice cap barrier. A fissure leading to the core of the earth provides steam heat, making the climate in this part of the world quite agreeable.

On their arrival in Leaphigh, they are treated somewhat scurvily by Dr. Reasono who gives them no credit for having rescued the party from slavery, or even for having returned himself and his companions to their native land. Indeed, when they venture into Leaphigh society, Bob the cabin-boy is lionized while Sir John is neglected badly considering his

wealth and rank. Nevertheless his education continues apace.

The Leaphigh financial system is based on "promises," their civilization being much too advanced to admit of the use of gold as a medium of exchange. This system seems to have its benefits as Chatterino explains, ". . .there has not been a bankruptcy in all Leaphigh since the law was passed making promises legal tender."[1]

Another peculiar monikin distinction is the emphasis on the tail, it being considered the seat of the reason. Human reason, cramped in the brain is involved and snarled while the monikin's, being located in his tail has, says Dr. Reasono, "'a beginning and an end, a directness and consecutiveness that are necessary to logic, and . . . a point.'"[2] Consequently the monikin of Leaphigh is proud of the length of his tail since it has a marked effect on his social acceptability. The primate of all Leaphigh wore not one but six tails, five others having been fastened to his own in some clever manner. This worthy cleric also was distinguished by his mantle, "the material of which was composed of every tenth hair taken from all the citizens of Leaphigh, . . ."[3]

The political system of Leaphigh is ingenious. At the head of the government is the king who reigns but does not

1. The Monikins, 331
2. Ibid., 299.
3. Ibid., 358.

govern, that function being performed by his first cousin of the male gender. At all public affairs the King and Queen are hidden from view by a damask curtain and speak through intermediators. Eventually the minister from Leaplow, Brigadier Downright, explains that, really, there is no king or queen. The nobles keep up the pretense in order that they may dry out that the throne is in danger when reforms are suggested. "'It is one thing to have no monarch and another to have no throne.'"[1]

A fancied insult to this non-existent monarch and his consort had resulted in Captain Poke's being tried and condemned to lose his tail (which was artificial) and his head which was real enough. However, after interminable legal argument, while poor Noah waited at the block, he was saved from death. The decaudization preceded the decapitation in the sentence. Consequently Noah had lost his reason and was no longer responsible for his acts nor subject to punishment. Persuaded by this narrow escape that it would be expedient to quit Leaphigh without delay, the explorers set sail for the nearby republic of Leaplow.

Leaplow is the exact opposite of Leaphigh. Where the latter is aristocratic the former is republican, indeed democratic, in its institutions. All monikins of Leaplow cut their tails short so that they will not be subject to the imputation of considering themselves better than their fellow citizens.

1. The Monikins, 372.

Every citizen has a right to hold office under the great rotatory principle. Generally the population is divided between two large parties, the Horizontals and the Perpendiculars, but occasionally a third group, the Tangents, make their weight felt.

On their arrival Sir John, Bob, and Captain Poke realize tidy profits from the sale of several bales of foreign opinions imported from Leaphigh. As Brigadier Downright says ". . . there is nothing on which our public opinions agree so well as the absolute deference they pay to foreign public opinions."[1]

The political organization of the country is based on the Great National Allegory (the Constitution). The government of Leaphigh had been a tripod supported by the king, the nobles and the people but gradually the nobles had assumed complete control. Leaplow, after it broke off from the mother country, determined to avoid this danger by creating one great social beam, supported by all the people. On top of this they erected a tripod similar to that of Leaphigh, but inverted, made up of the great sachem (the president), the riddles, (the Senate), and the legion or bobees, (the House of Representatives). Should one of these agents blunder and fall, he will not bring down the whole machine of state as in Leaphigh. Should such a fall occur, the people, who have elevated him in the first place, can toss him back up if they wish or send

1. The Monikins, 378.

another to fill his place. One flaw in this admirable system is that custom forbids reference to the constitution in cases of dispute in congress. Instead commentaries, particularly by foreign writers such as Ekrub (Burke), are referred to.

Poke and Sir John are elected to the House almost immediately after their arrival. One of the questions that comes up for debate is a speech by the great sachem demanding that Leapthrough pay the debt she owes Leaplow. (This is a reference to Jackson's speech on the "spoliation" claims.) The members of the House seem to be averse to receiving Leapthrough's money, especially if war be threatened. One patriotic speech on the horrors of war in particular catches Sir John's attention. Brigadier Downright soon shows him the true temper of the speaker, however.[1]

> "This person has lately bought a farm by the acre, which he is about to sell in village lots by the foot, and war will knock the whole thing on the head. It is this which stimulates his benevolence in so lively a manner."

During their stay in Leaplow the nation started going through a great moral eclipse. The symptoms of this occurrence were an absorbing interest in dollars, in caste, in scrambling after the world's goods. During this speculative boom all ordinary principles went by the board in the citizen's anxiety for gain. Those on top of the economic heap began reviling those less fortunate; in other words aristocratic notions were

1. The Monikins, 410.

beginning to set in. The brigadier lays this development at the foot of commercial experience.[1]

> ". . . so far as monikin experience goes - men may have proved to be better disposed - no government that is essentially influenced by commerce has ever been otherwise than exclusive and aristocratic." (emphasis mine)

The brigadier also lashes out at the social-stake system:[2]

> ". . .our experience shows that a monikin can be particularly careful of himself, and singularly negligent of his neighbor. Therefore do we hold that money is a bad foundation for power."

Thus, though there are weaknesses in the Leaplow system it still is better than an aristocratic government based on property representation would be. But even under the best of conditions, liberty "means exclusive privileges in one country, no privileges in another, and inclusive privileges in all."[3]

This was The Monikins. Why all the furor, we might ask, since it is really a clever and readable satire, written in good humor, with the best style that Cooper ever achieved? The criticisms of England, soon to be repeated in his travel books, gained Cooper few friends. Most of his observations seem to have been accurate as well as acute but they did not suit the purpose of the Anglophiles in America. Any criticism of America from a native was not to be taken lightly especially when that criticism centered itself on an attack on the

1. The Monikins, 415.
2. Ibid., 423.
3. Ibid., 433-434.

commercial classes and a defense of Andrew Jackson. Bad enough to suggest that our opinions came from abroad without suggesting that the people who held those opinions were aristocratic and un-American in their sentiments. Small wonder indeed is it that the Whigs rose as to a man to step on this upstart romancer who dared to criticize America in Jeffersonian terms. The Monikins almost finished the work begun by the finance controversy, the European novels and the Letter to his Countrymen: his reaction to his treatment by the press and the public in the "Effingham novels" nearly completely demolished his domestic reputation.

More Criticism

Five volumes of travels followed The Monikins. They were all badly received, especially the England which was assailed mightily. The American Quarterly complained of his support of Jackson in the quarrel with the Senate, of his ideas on commerce and especially of his arguments in favor of a high tariff.[1] Frazer's Magazine tore into his social adventures in the England, stating, "with all his republicanism, Cooper loves a lord."[2] The Knickerbocker said substantially the same thing.[3] Cooper answered Lockhart's review in the London Quarterly with

1. "Sketches of Switzerland by the author of The Spy", American Quarterly Review, XX (Sept., 1836), 243-244.

2. "Cooper's England", Fraser's Magazine, XVI (London, 1837), 240.

3. "Gleanings in Europe: England; Review" Knickerbocker, X (1837), 350-352.

an article in the Knickerbocker, which criticized Lockhart strongly.[1] Fraser's Magazine rushed into the fray with an article claiming that Cooper's spleen was being vented not on Lockhart but on Scott.[2] And so the battle of the periodicals raged on. Cooper's respect for a free press was rapidly diminishing as he saw that press confuse liberty and license. His next two novels were to attack that problem to some extent.

Homeward Bound is the story of the Effingham family's journey, through a chase, storm and shipwreck, from England to America. Like the Coopers, the Effinghams have spent many years abroad and are returning to an America different from that which they had left. The original plan had been to start with the arrival of the party in New York but "the cry was for 'more ship' until the work. . .became 'all ship'"[3]. The Effinghams are of the highest of American society. John, who has made his money in commerce is of a somewhat cold and detatched character, while Edward, the landed gentleman, and his daughter, Eve, represent the best that America can produce. Over against the rather rarified atmosphere existing about the Effingham entourage must be set the hearty, salt air of bluff Captain

1. "Mr. Cooper and the London Quarterly", Knickerbocker, XI (1838), 184-185.

2. "Epimonidas Grubb or Fenimore Cooper, versus The Memory of Sir Walter Scott", Fraser's Magazine, XIX (London, 1839), 371-379.

3. Homeward Bound, The Works of J. Fenimore Cooper, ten volumes, (New York, 1893), V, 475.

Truck. The good Captain represents the true genius of American democracy as Cooper had expounded it in his earliest novels but now he seems somewhat embarrassed by his untutored hero.

The foil for most of the criticism in the novel is one Steadfast Dodge, a newspaper publisher, of Connecticut origin. Dodge represents all that is worst in American life as Cooper saw it. He abuses the freedom of the press. He places "public opinion" over right, principle, or law and he is a slave to foreign opinion. In forming his own opinions Mr. Dodge is entirely subservient to the people, or any sufficiently vocal section thereof.[1]

> So much and so long had Mr. Dodge respired a moral atmosphere of this community-character, and gregarious propensity, that he had, in many things, lost all sense of his individuality; as much so, in fact, as if he breathed with a pair of county lungs, ate with a common mouth, drank from the town-pump, and slept in the open air.

Mr. Dodge is so full of democratic rights and equality that he fails to understand that political democracy does not mean social equality. The Effinghams and their friends do not desire Mr. Dodge's company. Mr. Dodge goes off complaining.[2]

> "These Effinghams. . .", he muttered, "think themselves everybody's betters; but we shall see! America is not a country in which people can shut themselves up in rooms, and fancy they are lords and ladies!"
> . . . . . .
> "Oh! I know when a man is blown up with notions of his own importance. As for Mr. John Effingham, he has been so long abroad that he has forgotten he is going home to a country of equal rights!"

1. Homeward Bound, 519-520.

2. Ibid., 563.

Mr. Dodge, for all his pretensions, is an admirer of wealth. When a charitable collection is taken up by the Captain he is ashamed that he cannot give an equal sum as the Effinghams.[1]

> . . . . . he had tacitly admitted in his own mind the general and vulgar ascendency of mere wealth; and quite as a matter of course, he was averse to confessing his own inferiority on a point that he had made to be all in all. . .

In spite of his excessive belief in democracy and Americanism and his thorough knowledge of the irresponsibility and fallibility of the Press, Steadfast was a dupe to foreign journalism, for ". . .whatever reached him from a European journal he implicitly swallowed whole."[2] Mr. Dodge was not a popular character with the reviewers. The latter, to a man, felt obliged to come to the rescue of their brother in arms. The Southern Literary Messenger chided Cooper for his efforts:[3]

> The native press has been the means of his fame, and is yet willing to do honor to its arch traducer, if he will but abandon the low and grovelling ambition of the politician, and plume himself for a literary immortality.

In another review, the same organ complained, "Mr. Dodge is not only a caricature, but a gross libel on the newspaper

1. Homeward Bound, 583.

2. Ibid., 590.

3. "Homeward Bound; Review" Southern Literary Messenger, IV (1838), 724.

editors of our country."[1] Francis Bowen remarked that Mr. Dodge's character was so exaggerated that it shows the author's lack of ability and good will rather than "the real faults and follies - many and serious enough - of the persons against whom the satire is aimed."[2]

Adverse remarks from the journals would not stop Cooper however for it was his place to correct the errors he found. Paul Powis, a young American, says, in Homeward Bound:[3]

> ". . . it is the duty of the citizen to reform and improve the character of his country. How can the latter be done if nothing but eulogies are dealt in? With foreigners, one should not deal too freely with the faults of his country, for foreigners cannot repair the evil; but with one's countrymen I see little use and much danger in observing a silence as to faults. The American, of all others, it appears to me, should be the boldest in denouncing the common and national vices, since he is one of those who, by the institutions themselves, has the power to apply the remedy."

If Homeward Bound had caused an explosion in the periodical press, its successor, Home as Found gave these worthies something to chew on. Strangely enough the comments are not so severe, perhaps because Cooper relaxed his critical campaign against the press to a considerable extent. The chief attack is against American provincialism. Thus among the minor

1. "Another Review of Homeward Bound," Southern Literary Messenger, IV (1838), 733.

2. F. Bowen, "Homeward Bound," North American Review, XLVII (October, 1838), 488.

3. Homeward Bound, 682.

characters we have Tom Howell, who believes everything English and nothing American, and Mr. Wenham, whose patriotism is of such an ultra quality that he can credit foreign nations with nothing of worth. New York society is ridiculed for its "lionizing" and its empty observance of English forms. One symbol of this provinciality is the widespread acceptance of Greek revival architecture. For, as Mr. John Effingham says,[1]

> ". . . no architecture, and especially no domestic architecture, can ever be above serious reproach, until climate, the uses of the edifice, and the situation, are respected as leading considerations."

It is with some feeling of shock that we learn that the author of these eminently sensible views should have modified his country home at Templeton (it is the old "castle" of Judge Temple in The Pioneers) by the addition of elements of the Gothic style! So much for provincialism.

There are however political overtones. The better classes of society have tendencies toward aristocracy. Eve's cousin Grace van Cortlandt says, "I think a republic odious."[2] The family pretty much disavows this sort of talk, since they are, in theory at least, sturdy republicans. The reason for such an unusual favoritism towards England is this same principle

1. Home as Found, The Works of J. Fenimore Cooper, ten volumes (New York, 1893), VI, 59-60.

2. Ibid., 19.

of aristocracy, says Paul Powis.[1]

> ". . . latterly, the leaning towards England is less the result of a simple mental dependence - though of that there still remains a disgraceful amount - than of calculation, and a desire in a certain class to defeat the dominion of the mass and to establish that of a few in its stead."

Closely tied up with this undesireable condition is a fever for movement, speculation, and improvement. Everybody is trying to get on in the world. Indeed the situation is similar to that of Leaplow during the great moral eclipse as John Effingham explains it:[2]

> "Extravagant issues of paper money, inconsiderate credits that commence in Europe and extend throughout the land, and false notions as to the value of their possessions, in men who five years since had nothing, has completely destroyed the usual balance of things, and money has got to be so completely the end of life, that few think of it as a means. . . . All principles are swallowed up in the absorbing desire for gain - national honor, permanent security, the ordinary rules of society, law, the Constitution, and everything that is usually so dear to men, are forgotten, or are perverted in order to sustain this unnatural condition of things."

We also have a few practical examples of Mr. Dodge in action. In company with Mr. Aristabulus Bragg, a gentleman who is to the law what Steadfast is to the press, he stirs up trouble for the family over the public's right to use a certain piece of land for a picnic ground. Mr. Bragg is an intelligent man and with proper advantages would have made an extremely useful citizen. Unfortunately he lacked those advantages; consequently, like Mr. Dodge he is a demagogue. The right of the individual to hold

1. Home as Found, 169.

2. Ibid., 55.

his own opinion, even if it be correct, they cannot comprehend.[1]

> Resisting the popular will, on the part of an individual, they considered arrogancy and aristocracy, per se, without at all entering into the question of the right or wrong. The people, rightly enough in the general signification of the term, they deemed to be sovereign; and they belonged to a numerous class, who view disobedience to the sovereign in a democracy, although, it be in his illegal caprices, very much as the subject of a despot views disobedience to his prince.

The inevitable result is the evolution of party control. Party control is evil in a democracy because it works for the benefit of the few rather than the mass. Cooper's concern over the evil effects of party may have been based partly on the classic interpretation in The Federalist.[2] It also derives from the Whig practice of sniping at Jackson, no matter what his policy, purely as a matter of partisan opposition. The wise man will not heed the demagogues but following the precept of the old commodore, vote for the man in public whom he would trust in private.[3]

After the publication of The American Democrat (1838), Cooper left for a time his critical prose. In this work he collected the ideas which he had spread throughout the novels discussed above, occasionally expanding them. It is comprised of a series of short essays with titles such as "On American

1. Home as Found, 114.

2. Cf. Alexander Hamilton, John Jay and James Madison, The Federalist, Modern Library, (New York, 1941), No. 10, 53-62.

3. Home as Found, 214.

Equality." Equality is a relative term for the "very existence of government of all, infers inequality."[1] In "On Liberty" he points out the fallacy of stating that majorities must rule for if this rule be not restricted constitutions will be of no avail. The persistence of this type of reasoning is one of the great causes of friction in a democracy for:[2]

> The disposition of all power is to abuses, nor does it at all mend the matter that its possessors are a majority. Unrestrained political authority, though it be confined to masses, cannot be trusted without positive limitations, men in bodies being but an aggregation of the passions, weaknesses and interests of men as individuals.

The conclusions of The American Democrat are similar to those of the Effingham novels: democracy is perhaps the best (because most free) form of government known to man but it is not above criticism. Unless properly restrained, a majority may become as tyrannical as your worst despot; the purpose of laws and the constitution in a democracy is to secure the liberty of the people by restraining partisan majorities.

After 1837 Cooper was engaged in a bitter war with the irresponsible editors of his day. Reviewers of the Effingham novels frequently attacked the books viciously and their author hardly less so. This campaign was intensified with the appearance of his History of the United States Navy, (two volumes, 1839). Cooper, on examining the facts of the battle

1. The American Democrat, (New York, 1931), 41.
2. Ibid., 182.

of Lake Erie felt that Elliott's performance on that occasion had not been given justice in view of the universal admiration of Commodore Perry. To the best of his ability he attempted to write the history according to the facts. He was accused of being a liar and of having an ulterior motive in his lies to boot. Cooper conducted his own prosecution of the libel suits in several instances, notably in the case of William Duer on the Naval History, settled in May 1842. Eventually Cooper brought such prominent Whig journalists as William Watson Webb, Horace Greely and Thurlow Weed to bay.[1] His grandson summed up his achievements in these trials as follows:[2]

> It is an interesting fact, . . . that Cooper succeeded in every lawsuit which he brought, except one, in which the Court held that the statement made by one of the newspapers sued did not constitute a libel. The verdicts often seemed small, but the juries and the Court always eventually held that the plaintiff was justified in bringing the suit. Morally and legally Cooper was right and his opponents and critics wrong.

This was a thankless task our novelist was engaged in, curbing the tongue of a vicious press. By 1849 an American journal was prepared to admit that never before had there been anyone,[3]

> . . . pursued with a more vindicative and untiring

1. Correspondence of James Fenimore Cooper, II passim.

2. Ibid., 472.

3. "Cooper's Works (The Spy: new edition)" United States Magazine and Democratic Review, XXV (July, 1849), 53-54.

malice by a portion of the public press, than this man, than whom the country boasts not a more brilliant genius, or a more distinguished patriot.

VI THE LAST DECADE

An Interlude of Romance

During the height of his libel suits, Cooper stopped writing novels of purpose to return to the field of romantic fiction. In 1840 he resurrected a younger Leatherstocking in the Pathfinder. The scout and his Indian friends are idealized here to an even greater extent than they had been in The Last of the Mohicans. Next he turned again to history as a source for Mercedes of Castile (1840), based on the first voyage of Columbus to the New World. The Pathfinder, having achieved some success, Natty Bumppo was presented to the public for the last time. The Deerslayer (1841) carries Natty and Chingachgook on their first warpath in the woods of New York. Last to appear, it holds first place in the series chronologically. Two novels of the sea followed next, The Two Admirals (1842), and Wing-and-Wing (1842). They were followed by another tale of the wilderness, Wyandotte (1843). A letter from an old shipmate asking,[1]

> Whether you are the Mr. Cooper who in 1806 or 1807 was on board the ship Sterling, Cap. Johnson, bound from New York to London, if so whether you recollect the boy Ned whose life you saved in London dock, on a Sunday. . .

was the inspiration for Ned Myers (1843). Ned Myers is really more a biography than a novel but it has always been included

1. James Fenimore Cooper, ed., Correspondence of James Fenimore Cooper, II (New Haven, 1922) 490.

in Cooper's works as fiction. Next came a novelette in Graham's Magazine (1843), The Autobiography of a Pocket Handkerchief. This was followed by two more sea-adventure stories, Afloat and Ashore (1844) and its sequel, Miles Wallingford (1844). New York was now beginning to be stirred by the anti-rent question and Cooper once again forsook romance to wield a didactic pen.

Land and Political Doctrine

Large areas of New York had been granted to individuals, either as outright gifts or at very favorable prices, in the days of the colony and in the decade after the Revolution as well. Other landlords in New York had, like Cooper's own father, bought their holdings as a speculation. Generally these large holdings had been disposed of by sale to tenants in small lots but some of the families had kept great tracts together, leasing parcels to farmers. Where this was the case, rents were usually quite low while leases were long. On some estates the leases were perpetual; on others they were for terms of years, twenty-one being a common figure; while on some the length of lease was three lives, that is, on reaching a satisfactory agreement as to the rental, the tenant would name three persons then living, his lease to expire when the last of them had died. The landlords generally refused to sell these farms to their tenants, preferring a low but steady income from rents to acquisition of liquid capital in larger amounts.

Frequently, also, there was a requirement of service or of payment in kind as part of the rental, these being relics of the semi-feudal system set up by the Dutch patroons.

The advance of democracy and the filling up of New York State had made many tenants desire strongly to purchase their farms, on terms favorable to themselves. When the landlords resisted their demands, the tenants threatened both force and political action. The government at Albany had put down such a movement in 1839 on the estates of the Rensselaers, but in the mid forties it had spread to such an extent that some five thousand tenants were involved. Since the two parties were fairly evenly matched in the state at the time, neither the Whigs nor the Democrats were anxious to alienate five thousand votes for the sake of protecting a somewhat questionable institution.[1]

Logically speaking the landlords had all the right. If they did not wish to sell their property the tenants had no recourse it seemed. Actually, in face of the growing democratization and industrialization of the nation, they were an anachronism. After a good deal of controversy and some bloodshed on the part of the "down-rent" tenants, the state constitution was amended in 1846 to change the laws of descent to that large landed properties would be broken up by forced sales to tenants. But before this Cooper had plunged into the fray with his anti-rent trilogy, on the side of the landlords. Here was threatened

1. Cf. Granville Hicks, "Landlord Cooper and the Anti-Renters," Antioch Review, V (Spring, 1945) 95-109.

the one thing he had feared most from democracy - the destruction of the individual's rights at the hands of the majority. His novels are an attempt to shock the better classes of citizens into action on the landlord's behalf. For, Cooper reasoned, once one kind of property is laid siege to, all property is threatened. Then indeed will democracy have failed in its purpose - to provide the maximum of liberty and the maximum of safety for the individual citizen consonant with the good of the whole. Cooper's position was that he was attempting to stop "progress;" history not law was against the landlords.

The first novel in the series, Satanstoe (1845), describes the establishment of a landed estate in the New York wilderness. Corney Littlepage and his friend Dirch von Valkenburg journey to the interior to settle their fathers' jointly-held land patent at Mooseridge. A friend, Herman Mordaunt whose daughter, Anneke, Corney marries, has a patent on the neighboring tract at Ravensnest. The story is an interesting tale of life in early New York; it has little to do with the anti-rent question beyond demonstrating the expense, difficulties, and dangers to which the landlords submitted in order to build up an inheritance for future generations of the family.

The second of the trilogy, The Chainbearer (1845), shows the process of surveying the patents into lots preparatory to sale. In his Preface, Cooper defends the unfriendly attitude towards yankee immigrants evinced in Satanstoe. Much of the

present strife is due to their entry into the New York wilderness he feels:[1]

> In our judgment the false principles that are to be found in a large portion of the educated classes, on the subject of the relation between landlord and tenant, are to be traced to the provincial notions of those who have received their impressions from a state of society in which no such relations exist. [i.e. New England]

Cooper is still a political democrat but he does not believe in social or economic equality, however. He goes on to say:[2]

> The column of society must have its capital as well as its base. It is only perfect while each part is entire and discharges its proper duty. In New York the great landholders long have, and do still, in a social sense, occupy the place of the capital. On the supposition that this capital is broken and hurled to the ground, of what material will be the capital that must be pushed into its place! We know of none half so likely to succeed as the country extortioner and the country userer! We would caution those who now raise the cry of feudality and aristocracy to have a care of what they are about. In lieu of King Log they may be devoured by King Stork.

The novel itself is more concerned with the background for the riots than their present status.

When the patents were first settled the Littlepage family offered prospective tenants leases at Ravensnest or fee simple purchases at Mooseridge. The immigrants preferred the lease to purchase, however.[3]

> . . . I soon discovered that these adventurers inclined more to leases than to deeds. It is true, I expected a small payment down, in the case of each absolute sale, while I was prepared to grant leases, for three lives, at very low rents at the best; and in the cases of a

1. The Chainbearer, The Works of J. Fenimore Cooper, ten volumes (New York, 1893), VI, 228.
2. Ibid., 228.
3. Ibid., 228.

> large proportion of the lots, those that were the least eligible by situation, or through their quality, to grant them leases without any rent at all, for the first few years of their occupation.

With an opportunity to get the use of land free or for a trifling sum, few of the settlers wished to tie up their little capital in a purchase in such a wild and uncertain country. Indeed in the early days, Mordaunt Littlepage tells us, the landlord seldom got any income from his lands at all.[1]

> . . . my grandfather had let his wild lands for nominal rents in nearly every instance . . . and in most cases the settler had enjoyed the use of the farm for several years for no rent at all. . . .
>
> The landlord was expected to head all subscriptions for everything that was beneficial or which professed to be beneficial to the estate; and the few hundreds a year, two or three at most, that my rent-roll actually exhibited were consumed among the farms of the 'nest. It was a matter of record that not one shilling had the owner of this property, as yet, been able to carry away with him for his own private purposes.

Mordaunt Littlepage examines the new republican government set up by the revolution and finds in it many strengths but one fundamental weakness.[2]

> ". . . it will want the active living principle of steady, consistent justice, since there will be no independent power whose duty and whose interest it will be to see it administered. The wisest man I ever knew has prophesied to me that this is the point on which our system will break down, rendering the character, the person and the property of the citizen insecure, and consequently the institutions odious to those who once have loved them."

Cooper's faith in democracy is beginning to shake as he sees

1. The Chainbearer, 317.

2. Ibid., 330.

the rights of individuals trampled upon by a domineering majority.

In The Redskins (1846), Cooper threw down the gage of battle with no reservations.[1]

> I see no patriotism in concealing a wholesome truth; and least of all shall I be influenced by the puerility of a desire to hide anything of this nature, because I cannot communicate it to my countrymen without communicating it to the rest of the world. . . . No, no! great national truths are not to be treated as the gossiping surmises of village crones. He who reads what I write, therefore, must expect to find what I think of matters and things, and not exactly what he may happen to think on the same subject. Anyone is at liberty to compare opinions with me; but I ask the privilege of possessing some small liberty of conscience in what is, far and near, proclaimed to be the only free country on the earth.

First we must understand that leasehold tenures are not opposed to our institutions, on the contrary they form a part of them "'because the institutions have a solemn profession of protective property.'" Indeed, says Hugh Roger Littlepage,[2]

> "The 'spirit' of all political institutions is to place a check on the natural propensities of men, to restrain them and keep them within due bounds; while the tendencies follow those propensities, and are, quite often, in direct opposition to the spirit."

Arguments that these tenures are feudal and contrary to the spirit of America are thus easily refuted.

This attack on landed property will cause the destruction of the most elevated segment of the population. The property

1. The Redskins, 468, volume VI of The Works of J. Fenimore Cooper, ten volumes (New York, 1893), 461-718.

2. Ibid., 480.

owners will sell out,[1]

> "bag their dollars, and proceed forthwith to Wall Street, and commence the shaving of notes -- that occupation having been decided, . . . to be highly honorable and praiseworthy. Hitherto they have been nothing but drones; but, by the time they can go to the quick with their dollars, they will become useful members of society, and be honored and esteemed accordingly."

To Cooper, whose antipathy towards the commercial classes has already been noted, such an end would be little short of catastrophic. The anti-rent question bid fair to remove the one stabilizing element in an already over-fluid society.

Despite all the fancy speeches about the rights of the people and natural law, the root of the movement is in simple covetousness. Tom Miller tells us.[2]

> "The plain matter is, friend, that they who have little, envy them that's got much; and the struggle is to see which is the strongest. On the one side is the law, and right, and bargains, and contracts; and on the other thousands - not of dollars, but of men. Thousands of voters; d'ye understand?"

The same worthy scoffs at the cry of aristocracy raised by the anti-rent faction. There is no aristocracy among the rich of America he declares.[3]

> "Rich men get very few offices, to begin with; for it's an argument in favor of the man for an office, that he's poor, and wants it. Folks don't ask who the office wants, as who wants the office. Then, as for taxes, there isn't much respect paid to the rich on that score.

1. The Redskins, 483.

2. Ibid., 537.

3. Ibid., 537 .

> Young 'Squire Littlepage pays the tax on this farm directly himself, and its assessed half as high ag'in, all things considered, as any other farm on his estate."

Leasehold tenures are not feudal then, but in keeping with our institutions; long leases were desired by the settlers in preference to purchase of farms. The "aristocracy" is a joke since it has no political power and is discriminated against economically. The basis of the whole movement is greed not law or right. The failure of government to protect property, in fear of angering voters, is disgraceful. If the present movement keeps up, the least that can happen will be the destruction of the landlord in New York; at worst, all property will be in danger of being swept away.

For once the Whigs had something good to say for Cooper, in spite of his sniping at commerce. The American Review expressed pleasure that the author was a "Democrat" because it felt that this would make people listen to him. The Redskins displays "an utter fearlessness of popular prejudices and that mighty bug-bear, 'public opinion'".[1] The old democrat was near the end of his road.

Last Words

Cooper's next novel, The Crater (1847), dealt with an ideal community on a South Sea Island. In time, the happiness of the founders is disturbed by a pair of demagogues, a

1. C. A. Bristed, "Cooper's Indian and Injun", American Review IV (September, 1846), 277.

lawyer and a newspaper editor, who convince the people that their institutions need changing. The colony's constitution is revamped by a convention elected on the principle of majority-rule but actually representing the wishes of a minority of the people. For, the ". . . rule of the majority is so very sacred a thing that it is found necessary to regulate it by legerdemain. No good republican ever disputes its principle, while no sagacious one ever submits to it."[1] Universal suffrage is a dangerous political system when the people are susceptible to the sway of morally corrupt leaders. The fruit of the anti-rent disturbances was a definite shift in Cooper's thinking. Pure numerical democracy had been tried and found wanting.[2]

> A majority of the electors of the State of New York are, at this moment, opposed to universal suffrage. . . but moral cowardice holds them in subjection. . . . the select aristocrats and monarchists are the least bold in acting frankly, and in saying openly what they think; leaving that office to be discharged, as it ever will be, by the men who -- true democrats and not canting democrats -- willing to give the people just as much power as they know how to use, or which circumstances will allow them to use beneficially to themselves, do not hesitate to speak with the candor and manliness of their principles. These men call things by their right names, equally eschewing the absurdity of believing that Nature intended rulers to descend from male to male, according to the order of primogeniture, or the still greater nonsense of supposing it necessary to obtain the most thrifty plants from the hot-bed of the people, that they may be transplanted into the beds of state, reeking with the manure of the gutters.

1. The Crater, The Works of J. Fenimore Cooper, ten volumes, (New York, 1893), V, 237.

2. Ibid., 237.

The fallacy of democracy is that the mass of the people are not capable of governing themselves. The average man may properly aid in the selection of qualified representatives to direct public affairs; there his connection with political institutions should stop, leaving government in the hands of responsible authority.[1]

> . . . the more a people attempt to extend their power DIRECTLY over state affairs, the less they, in fact, control them, after once having passed the point of naming lawgivers as their representatives, merely bestowing on a few artful managers the influence they vainly imagine to have secured to themselves.

For all his anti-Puritan bias, Cooper was substantially in agreement with John Winthrop in the concept of government by the "good, just, and honest."

Eventually, Mark Woolston, the founder of the colony, and his friends leave the island. They prefer abandoning their beloved home to submitting to the rule of those who, as a contemporary reviewer expressed it, were not (like themselves) ". . . gentlemanly Episcopalians who are not so wicked as to believe in vox populi vox dei and other abominations. . ."[2] These are harsh words for the Democratic Review, long a Cooper champion, but still harsher were to follow:[3]

> In many respects "The Crater" resembles the Monnikins, [sic] a book which everybody ridicules but nobody reads. . . . intended for keen political satire . . .

1. The Crater, 237.

2. "Cooper's Last Novel", United States Magazine and Democratic Review, XXI (November, 1847), 422.

3. Ibid., 445.

> no one will claim for Mr. Cooper the character of a satirist. . . . We have no disposition to underrate Mr. Cooper's peculiar talent, in the exercise of which he has always been successful, while he has uniformly failed whenever he has attempted to write in another vein.

After The Crater, Cooper wrote three more novels, Jack Tier (1848), published in Graham's Magazine 1845-47 as Rose Bud, The Sea Lions (1848), and The Ways of the Hour (1850). The latter is an attack on the institution of trial by jury, the ancient palladium of Anglo-Saxon liberties. In a democracy, where public opinion is so easily swayed, a jury can commit the gravest of errors, Cooper tells us. The novel deals with a fantastic case in criminal law - in brief, the conviction of an insane woman of arson, murder, and theft when she is, in fact, innocent of all crime. Francis Bowen scoffed at this absurd plot, remarking, "There may be defects and evils in the administration of our country, but this certainly is not the way to expose or mend them."[1] The Preface is of far greater significance than the plot, however. Here the author demonstrates his real reasons for attacking jury trials.[2]

> In trials between railroad companies and those who dwell along their lines, prejudice is usually so strong against the former that justice for them is nearly hopeless. In certain parts of the country, the juries are made the instruments of defeating the claims of creditors who dwell at a distance, and are believed to have interests opposed to the particular community where the debtor resides.

1. F. Bowen, "Cooper's Ways of the Hour", North American Review, LXXI (July, 1850), 133.

2. The Ways of the Hour, The Works of J. Fenimore Cooper, ten volumes (New York, 1893), IX, 3.

> This is a most crying evil and has been the source of many and grievous wrongs.

In other words property cannot protect itself against the assaults of the propertyless. Again Cooper's fears arise from the destruction of property rights at the hands of the anti-renters. To a later age his solicitude for the railroad companies seems somewhat unnecessary but at this time the railroads were short lines owned by small companies for the most part; powerful combinations were not to appear for a quarter of a century. It is also interesting to note that Cooper had developed an interest in liquid capital. Real property had shown itself unequal to the struggle for survival in a democracy.

Though The Ways of the Hour was Cooper's final novel, the last year of his life was not an idle one. He wrote a play, a short allegory, and part of a history of New York. Upside Down or Philosophy in Petticoats, the text of which is not extant, was "a partial success".[1] Though well-acted and presented in one of New York's leading theatres, it ran only four nights.[2] Its theme was a comic treatment of socialism and women's rights; a contemporary review gives some of the spirit of the comedy:[3]

> Mr. Lovell (Burton) is an old bachelor, of the non-progres-

1. The Albion, New York, n.s. IX (Saturday, 22 June 1850), 296.

2. Tuesday through Friday, 18-21 June 1850. New York Daily Tribune, X, #2862-2865, 5. (Advertisements for Burton's Theater.)

3. The Albion, loc. cit.

> sive school, eschewing all new lights, and new fangled systems and theories, in fact a re-production of Mr. Effingham, and Mr. Tom Dunscombe, or in plain language, Mr. Cooper in propria persona. . . . Mr. Lovell's nephew Frank (Jordan) has imbibed the communist doctrines of the day, and is moreover a firm disciple of the school of progress; and as a comedy could not succeed without a love passage, Master Frank is the devoted admirer of a Miss Emily (Miss Russell), the ward of old Lovell. Frank's liberal principles, of course, are obnoxious to his uncle, and are equally repulsive to the young lady.

In due time and after a marital mix-up, the evil forces of innovation are put down in favor of tradition. Cooper's attack on the new thought of the day is indicative of his retreat into the past as old age crept on him.

If Upside Down was gently satirical, the allegorical sketch was a savage indictment of American demagoguery. In The Lake Gun, a traveler named Fuller goes to Lake Seneca to investigate reports of a mysterious tree, known locally as the "Wandering Jew", which travels about the lake half-submerged. While searching for the tree, he meets an Indian who tells him that in the tree is the spirit of a Seneca named See-Wise. See-Wise had led his people from their traditional ways of fishing into injurious practices; he was a demagogue. For his flaunting of authority, he was condemned to float a thousand years in Lake Seneca in the form of a great tree trunk. Whenever he attempts to break the terms of his confinement, a booming noise ("the lake gun") is heard to issue from the depths of the water. It is the voice of the Manitou warning him to stay away from his old fishing grounds.

See-Wise had been influential before his downfall because he told his tribesmen things they wished to hear, the Indian tells Fuller:[1]

> "They liked each other because they praised each other. It is sweet to be told that we are better and wiser than all around us. It is sweet to the red man; the pale-faces may have more sober minds."

But this propensity of man is not an isolated phenomenon from the past; he continues:[2]

> "I hear a great deal of what demagogues are doing among your people, and of the evil they produce. They begin by flattering, and end by ruling. He carries a strong hand, who makes all near him help to uphold it. In the crowd few perceive its weight until it crushes them."

Fuller and the Indian catch a glimpse of the log floating in the distance. It is a matter of but a few moments to get into the former's boat and approach for a closer view. On inspection, the log seems to have a human countenance, the visage being hatchet-shaped, "the aspect of a demagogue."[3] As they contemplate the ancient hulk, both the Indian and Fuller philosophize on its meaning. The Seneca sees danger in such as See-Wise:[4]

> "They mislead the ignorant, arouse evil passions, and raise themselves into authority by their dupes. The man who tells the people their faults is a truer friend than he who harps only on their good qualities. . . . Accursed by the man who deceives, and who opens his mouth only to lies! Accursed, too, is the land that neglects the councils of the fathers to follow those of the sons!"

1. The Lake Gun, R. E. Spiller, ed., (New York, 1932), 47.
2. Ibid., 47.
3. Ibid., 52.
4. Ibid., 52-53.

Fuller feels that there is a close parallel between the Indian tradition and contemporary America:[1]

> "Men who, in their hearts, really care no more for mankind than See-Wise cared for the fish, lift their voices in shouts of a spurious humanity, in order to raise themselves to power, on the shoulders of an excited populace. Bloodshed, domestic violence, impracticable efforts to attain an impossible perfection, and all the evils of a civil conflict are forgotten or blindly attempted, in order to raise themselves in the arms of those they call the people."

The story of See-Wise points an obvious moral; a wise nation will rid itself of its Jack Cades. As the Seneca says, "'The man or the people that trust in God will find a lake for every See-Wise.'"[2]

The Lake Gun was the last of Cooper's works to be published during his lifetime. At the time of his death, he was engaged in an unfinished history of New York to which he had assigned the tentative title of The Towns of Manhattan. The manuscript was destroyed by fire before printing, only the introduction being preserved for publication in The Spirit of the Fair (1863). This fragment indicates the bitterness and despair which had crept into the old man's mind. Political democracy, with its social and economic overtones, had destroyed the America he loved. The landholding class in New York had lost first its political and social power and finally its property as well. The old aristocracy of wealth and talents had fallen before the

1. The Lake Gun, 53-54.

2. Ibid., 54.

wave of money-grubbing, democratic mediocrity. His earlier prophecy (made in the Preface to The Chainbearer) that the deposition of King Log would lead only to the despotism of King Stork seemed closer to fruition than ever before.[1]

An aristocracy, albeit selfish, had made London great. Property representation had preserved the best of English society so that it might rule -- politically and socially as well as economically.[2]

> But representation forms no part of the machinery of American policy. It is supposed that man is too intellectual and philosophical to need it, in this intellectual and philosophical country, par excellence. Although such is the theory, the whole struggle in private life is limited to the impression made by representation in the hands of individuals. That which the Government has improvidently cast aside, society has seized upon: and hundreds who have no claim to distinction beyond the possession of money, profit by the mistake to place themselves in positions perhaps that they are not always exactly qualified to fill. Of all social usurpations, that of mere money is the least tolerable -- as one may have a very full purse with empty brains and vulgar tastes and habits.

Despite the mouthings of ambitious politicians, the democracy of the day was not the thought of the Founding Fathers. The latter (as The Federalist clearly attests) were interested in limiting the attacks of government on the individual, especially in his property rights, not in extending democracy.[3]

Republicanism means the sovereignty of public things,

1. supra.
2. New York, D. R. Fox, ed., (New York, 1932), 8.
3. Ibid., 21-22.

> instead of that of persons; or the representation of common interests, in lieu of those of a monarch. There is no common principle of popular sway recognized in the Constitution.

Indeed, most of our troubles today arise from weaknesses of democracy -- "the struggles of faction", and[1]

> . . . dissolute politicians, who care only for the success of parties, and who make a stalking-horse of philanthropy, as they would of religion or patriotism, or any other extended feeling that happened to come within their influence. . .

It is the demagogues who are most to be feared in American life, for they control parties. The people deceive themselves when they think they rule: actually they are the slaves of factions,[2]

> that are themselves controlled most absolutely by the machinations of the designing. A hundred thousand electors, under the present system of caucuses and conventions, are just as much wielded by command as a hundred thousand soldiers in the field; and the wire-pullers behind the scenes can as securely anticipate the obedience of their agents, as the members of the bureaux in any cabinet in Europe can look with confidence to the compliance of their subordinates. Party is the most potent despot of the times.

The people are their own worst enemies and ". . . the numerous and serious innovations they are making on all sides, on not only the most venerable principles in favor with men, but on

1. New York, 22,34.

2. Ibid., 38-39.

the divine law. . ." must lead to serious evil.[1]

Besides wiping out the landlord class, the New York Constitution and the events leading up to it had shattered what remained of Cooper's faith in the simple farmer. He sadly concludes that the motive of all is gain, the propensity being merely ". . . more engrossing among merchants than tillers of the soil."[2] There are compensatory considerations however:[3]

> The man who is accustomed to deal in large sums is usually raised above the more sordid vice of covetousness and avarice in detail. There are rich misers, certainly, but they are exceptions. We do not believe the merchant is one tittle more mercenary than the husbandman in his motives, while he is certainly much more liberal of his gains. One deals in thousands, the other in tens and twenties. It is seldom, however, that a falling market, or a sterile season, drives the owner of the plough to desperation, and his principles, if he have any, may be preserved; while the losses or risks of an investment involving more than a merchant really owns, suspend him for a time on the tenter-hooks of commercial doubt. The man thus placed must have more than a common share of integrity, to reason right when interest tempts him to do wrong.

Not only has the simple Jeffersonian faith been abandoned, but distrust of the power of ". . . the class of the needy . . . and they who had no other stake in society than their naked assistance . . ." suggests that ". . . radical changes must speedily come . . ." or the institutions themselves will be abandoned.[4] The anti-rent crisis has clearly demonstrated to

1. New York, 41-42.
2. Ibid., 16.
3. Ibid., 16-17.
4. Ibid., 48-49.

property the necessity for collective action, if destruction is to be avoided:[1]

> and woe to that land which gives so plausible an excuse to the rich and intelligent for combining their means to overturn the liberties of a nation as is to be found in abuses like those just named.

What was the solution? Cooper didn't know. There seemed to be three possibilities; "the bayonet, a return to the true principles of the original government, or the sway of money."[2] There was little danger of the first as yet, of that he was sure. The second, while desireable, was not probable. Wealth will migrate from the rural areas to the great commercial marts. Here it may be possible to keep some check on the grasping populace.[3]

> The danger to valuable and moveable property would be too imminent, and those who felt an interest in its preservation would not fail to rally in its defence.

Once removed from its vulnerable isolation in the country, "... associated wealth will take care of itself."[4]

Cooper's indecision is a hint of the struggle going on within him. All his life he had distrusted the speculative arena of Wall Street; his faith had been placed in the country gentleman whose assured wealth had placed him above the petty

1. New York, 50.
2. Ibid., 51.
3. Ibid., 57.
4. Ibid., 59.

concerns of the market place. Even John Effingham had sneered at the stock-jobbers and speculators. But real property having been proved to be incapable of defense against concerted attack, there seemed no alternative to investment in personalty, with all its attendant risks and lack of stability. Reluctantly, he embraced the commercial philosophy. A few months later the disillusioned old man was dead.

VII CONCLUSIONS

Progress of a Democrat

James Fenimore Cooper began life on the New York frontier. Here he absorbed some of the belief in the capabilities of the common man which were a part of frontier life. His marriage tended to nullify this early influence to some extent by tying him to the aristocratic De Lancey family. As he began to write he expressed both his nationalism and his incipient democratic philosophy in novels glorifying the American scene and idealized representatives of the common man. Contact with Europe awakened in him a desire to express these concepts more concretely; The Notions of the Americans and the European novels are the fruition of this plan. He returned from Europe convinced that America was the greatest nation on earth. Where he found unhealthy symptoms of decay in the democratic state, - subservience to foreign opinion, sentiments favoring aristocracy, and misuse of the democratic dogma itself - he exposed them. As a citizen it was his duty to do so. His early criticisms, sharp as they may be, are meant to be instructive. Since America refused to listen to his voice, he gave up the uneven struggle for a time but not without defeating the virulent reviewers who had challenged him as an individual. Once again he gave the public romance, until the complete disavowal of principle in New York's anti-rent crisis drove him to take up his pen again. His faith in democracy died with the Littlepage Manuscripts. Henceforth his progress was

straight towards conservatism of the most rigid sort. At the end of his life he had rejected the Jeffersonian ideal of the simple husbandman in favor of the superior virtue of the merchant and speculator.

The Well-Tempered Democrat

Cooper's reactions were consistently those of an eighteenth century gentleman of liberal views. He believed in democracy as a political force but did not accept the ideals of social and economic equality as worthy. Democratic equality meant, to him, an equality of rights before the law. The essence of democracy was its ability to entrust the power of the nation to the mass of the people while protecting the interests and liberty of the individual. When the institutions were perverted and principle was discarded for a majority interest his faith in the nation was destroyed. Changing conditions had destroyed the old democracy. Rather than bow down to the new demagoguery, he went over to the camp of the commercial interests. Cooper's democracy was as even and straightforward as ever; it was the country which had changed. The gentlemen at Wall Street seemed, to Cooper, to represent a closer connection with the good life that was gone than did the grasping demagogues of the rural districts.

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
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Abstract of Thesis

JAMES FENIMORE COOPER: WELL-TEMPERED DEMOCRAT

by
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VIII ABSTRACT

During his own lifetime James Fenimore Cooper was revered for his contributions to American romance and reviled for his expression of political thought. After his death, until comparatively recently, Cooper the romantic novelist has lived. His controversial prose, fiction and non-fiction has been neglected for the most part. Yet to a student of American civilization the stature of the man must depend upon his functional contributions to American life.

Born in New Jersey and bred on the New York frontier at Cooperstown, Cooper represents the view of middle-Atlantic society as opposed to that of commercial New England or the slaveholding South. By marriage he was connected with New York's landed gentry. Throughout his life he was to embody within a conflict between the democracy of the frontier and the aristocracy of the social milieu in which he moved.

Having been thrown into literature, almost by chance, with a novel of English society (Precaution) Cooper decided to write "one wholly American by way of atonement". The immediate success of The Spy, at home and abroad, encouraged him to compose a series of romantic fictions dealing with the sea, the past and the American frontier. His most significant characters - Harvey Birch, Natty Bumppo and Long Tom Coffin - were idealizations of the average American. His artistic purpose was a romantic glorification of the democratic ideal.

A visit to Europe (1826) made with the primary purpose of educating his children brought a marked change in Cooper's life. The abysmal ignorance of things American which he discovered even in well-informed European society led him to produce a "travel" book on his native land, Notions of the Americans (1828). Contact with Lafayette in Paris sharpened his democratic thought. Observation of European despotisms increased his pride in being an American. The reaction was, inevitably, a series of novels which probed deep into European institutions, exposing the inhumanity of non-democratic regimes. Much to his surprise these works, The Bravo, The Heidenmauer and The Headsman, were not well-received at home. Subservience to foreign opinion among the press would not allow of a criticism of Europe on American principles.

On his return (1833), Cooper defended himself for his insistence on writing about American principles rather than American things. His relationship with the press was not meliorated when he brought his new-found critical faculties to bear on American life. A satire, The Monikins, and two attempts at the novel of manners, Homeward Bound and Home as Found, were unmercifully flayed by the periodicals, particularly those with a Whiggish cast. His honest attempts at criticism having netted him little but loss of reputation and personal vilification at the hands of the reviewers, the novelist returned to the field of the romantic tale.

His own experience had caused him to lose some of his enthusiasm for the democratic dogma. Growing evidences of demagoguery in American life confirmed that sentiment. In The American Democrat he made a searching analysis of American society. The rise of the anti-rent movement in New York furthered his disillusionment. His response was an instinctive one, a trilogy ("The Littlepage Manuscripts") defending the landlords and vigorously attacking the lack of principle on the part of the tenants. Again he failed. The New York Constitution of 1846 provided for what amounted to expropriation of the landlords' property.

The closing years of his life found Cooper turning more and more from his early beliefs. The hope of democracy had been that it provided the individual with a maximum of liberty and security within a framework of government based on majority rule. Under the guidance of demagogues, factions had seized control; individual rights were swept away before "the tyranny of a majority". The anti-rent controversy had negated his faith in the Jeffersonian philosophy. In New York at least, those who labored in the earth had shown themselves to be other than "the chosen people of God."

The year before he died he wrote a novel, The Ways of the Hour, attacking the jury trial in a democracy. When public opinion is under the control of unscrupulous politicians, the jury becomes not a safeguard of liberty but an instrument of

of persecution. By the time of his death, Cooper had come to the conclusion that if property were to protect itself it must concentrate in liquid capital in a commercial mart such as New York. Both the frontier and the gentry had distrusted the Eastern banker and merchant. Cooper's final, though reluctant, acceptance of their credo, demonstrates the despair to which he had been reduced by the changes in American life.

Throughout his life Cooper was a gentleman democrat. He supported the democratic ideal against the carping of European aristocrats; he criticized the weak elements in the structure of American society; finally he raged at what seemed, to him at least, the perversion of her doctrines in the interests of powerful factions. His patriotism, profound as it was, was never of the "my country, right or wrong" brand. He praised American democracy when he found it strong, reserving the right to criticize, to instruct, when he found it weak.

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